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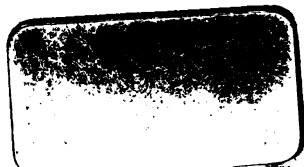
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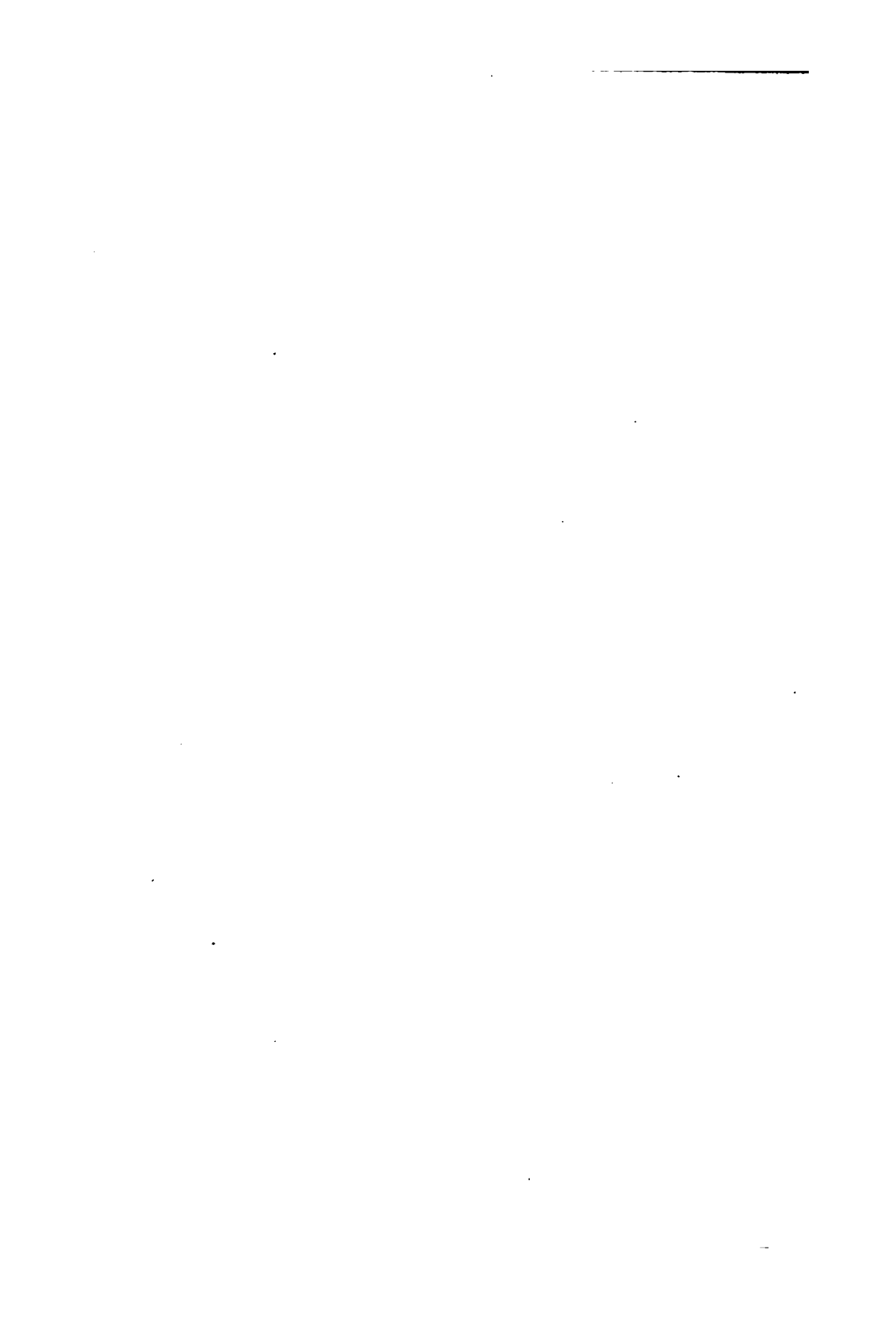
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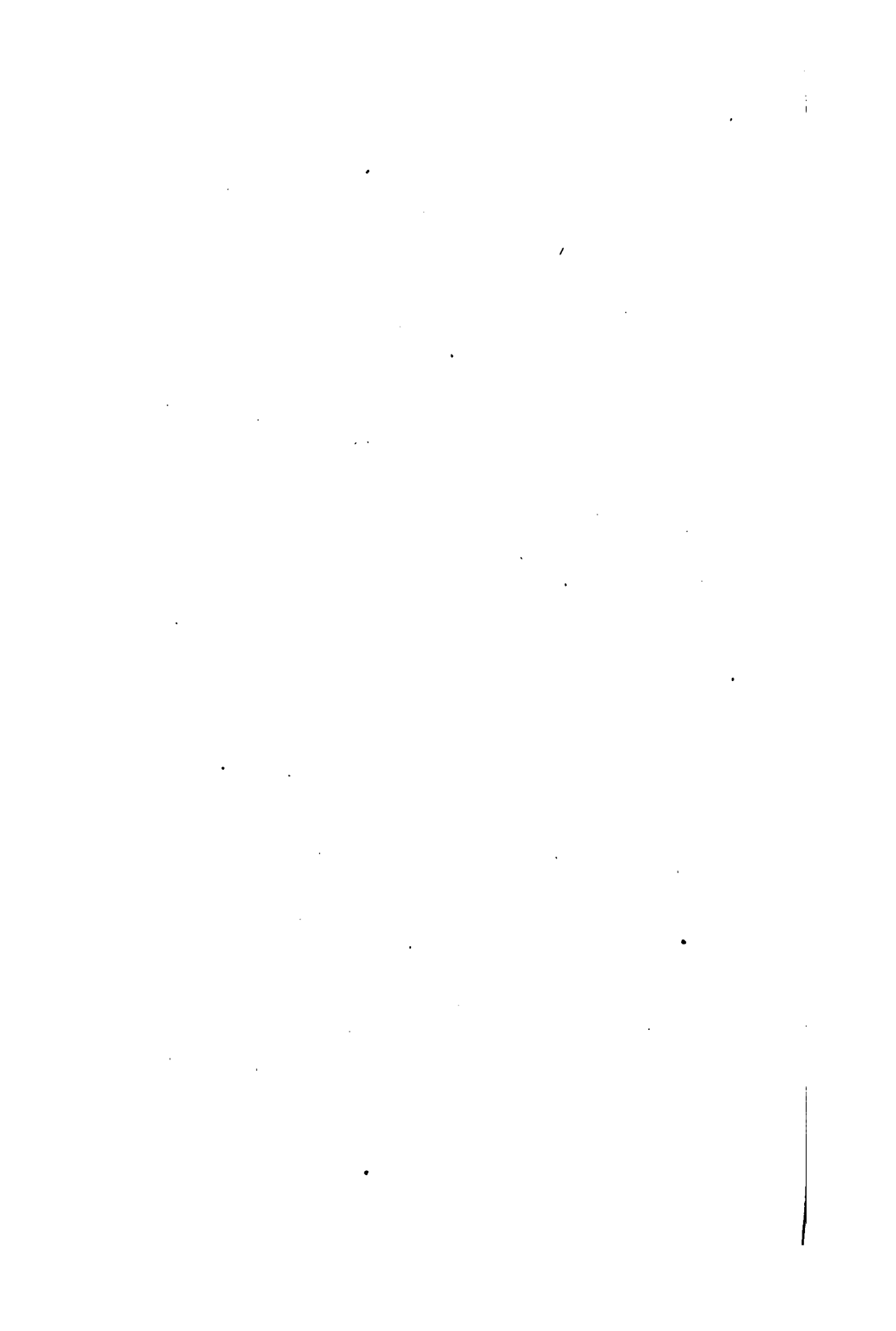




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V I O L E T B A N K

AND

ITS INMATES.

"Love is hurt with jar and fret,
Love is made a vain regret,
Eyes with idle tears are wet,
Idle habit links us yet,
What is Love? for we forget.
Ah No. No."—TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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VIOLET BANK

AND ITS INMATES.

CHAPTER I.

Two young girls on a visit in a country house, hold a Harlequin's wand, that in the twinkling of an eye changes the settled habits of a quarter of a century.

The Ashburn establishment, which usually went on with the sobriety of good clock-work machinery, received from Grace and

Flora the tap of the fairy wand, and forth-with the grey-haired butler and steady footman might have been seen by Miss Miller herself, moving with a gait very like a run; and as for the housemaids, it is no scandal to say they were positively often caught tripping by their mistress.

Mr. Hitzig thought the exchange might flourish another day without him, so he let Mr. Miller ride forth on Whisky, to commune with himself whether he also would not have preferred sauntering on the pleasant turf, and inhaling the fragrance of flowery earth, "to that of an atmosphere thick with breathings after Mammon."

The Twiston banker went on his lonely way, turning his head more than once as he rode down the long avenue, to catch

a glimpse of a blue muslin gown waving by the side of his portly partner.

Mr. Hitzig and the "Cousinchen," after a while, seat themselves on a rustic bench, on the lawn, screened from the sun by the high hedge.

Madge frolics, in her tom-boy fashion, with an old pointer, both occasionally scouring away out of sight.

Grace has explained about Vick and her legacy, and now Mr. Hitzig would like to hear something of herself and family, but on this topic he finds Grace shy.

The troubled time of her life, when the black thread hid both white and grey, seems so long ago to Grace.

On her heart there rest now, only cloud-shadows of past anguish.

She strives to make Mr. Hitzig understand that any discomfort they have had, has since vanished.

She tells him of what true friends they have, and the buoyancy of the moment lending its aid, she made out a very tolerable case for herself.

But Mr. Hitzig knew of Peter Schirr's comfortable fortune, and he sifted out, bit by bit, that it was all gone, and that Mrs. Lloyd and her children were actually poor.

When he had got the information he wanted, he said ;—

“ If it depended on me, I would leave this poor Miss your friend in peace, with her legacy ; but I have sisters, and worse still, brothers-in-law. You must be so kind as to take these *Fakta* into consideration.”

"But Miss Vick would never wish—"

"Pardon me, my best cousin, but above all, my maxim is, only to consult with Principals. I must see my fair enemy myself. Now let us speak of your brother, fine youth."

"You don't know how steady and good he is," said Grace, with a glowing face, and her large, serious eyes raised with earnestness to her new found relative's face. "He denies himself every pleasure, and even more than that, to help us at home."

"God help her," thought Mr. Hitzig, "and only a quarter of an hour ago, she would have made me believe they wanted for nothing—these women—these women!"

"I could never have managed without

Frankie," went on the eager, unconscious Grace.

"Then it would never do to propose his leaving you," asked Mr. Hitzig.

The delicate bloom on Grace's cheek paled.

Mr. Hitzig continued, "Man is seldom in circumstances to be able accurately to reckon up the consequences of his one action, so I never, as a rule, urge any peculiar course upon any one. Still, I see an opening for your brother in Hamburg; he *must* leave England some day, no room for him *here*. What can Miller do for him? nothing—next to nothing—raise his salary a few shillings per week."

Grace began to feel rather sick; her only one! but she must not think of herself, her sorrow or her comfort; she must agree

to anything that is to be a benefit to that dear brother.

How many, many shrink when that cup of trial is proposed to them, to part with the most beloved: yet, how few mothers and sisters but drink it to the dregs in patient, uncomplaining silence.

Just at this crisis of the *tête-à-tête*, out rushes the little Countess, crying aloud, "Miss Lloyd, Miss Lloyd, we want you very much; you must come in, and play an accompaniment to a song. Oscar is in such a state with my bungling. Do, there's a dear thing."

This call was like a reprieve to Grace; she did not wish for any more conversation with Mr. Hitzig at present; she had a certain foreboding that he was going to show her some very cruel kindness.

She let Flora lead her away, though assuring Captain Oscar, who had come to back the request in person, "that she never had played anything at sight in her life."

"It's only a few chords," said Oscar, in that rich voice of his, "but Flora pretends she cannot reach an octave."

"No more I can," affirmed Flora, holding up a pair of real six and three-quarter hands, and tiny enough they were to be excused trying to reach octaves.

* * * *

Many days passed evenly by, or rather seemed to pass evenly by.

No day, however smooth, glides away without leaving its own individual mark

on us ; too slight it may be for our limited vision to detect, until the congregated signs of a long passage of time startle us by the large print in which they record the fact.

Nothing passes evenly by, in this world of ours ; mysterious agencies are constantly at work, shaping out our destiny, or changing that which we had believed our permanent state of feeling.

The wind wafts, or a bird carries a seed, and straightway from the crevice of a rock shoots forth a rare flower ; so will some trifling service,—even a glance or a word,—any common occurrence of common life, sow new feelings in the human heart, generate new events, bringing forth, each after its kind, fruit for good or evil.

Very smoothly did Grace's visit appear

to be passing ; she was happy—very happy, conscious of a new-born elasticity of mind and spirits. If she reflected at all, on what might be the cause, she attributed it to the universal kindness of every one at Ashburn, to the beauty of the place, to the fineness of the weather, or to not being stifled with Twiston smoke.

The Countess was no longer Countess to Grace, but Flora ; and Flora, to use her own words, had long ago given up Miss Lloyding Grace.

Captain Oscar had magnanimously recanted his first opinion, that Grace was insipid, and allowed that she was a nice lady-like girl, with whom a man might hazard a rational conversation, without the fear of a scrape before his eyes. That this should be all that Captain Oscar felt about

Grace, seemed impossible to the Captain's elder brother, who was feeling so very much more. A proof, if any were needed, of how careful we ought to be of attributing our own sensations or emotions to others.

On their first meeting at Miss de Witt's tea-party, two years previous to this present visit of Grace to Ashburn, Mr. Miller had contemplated her with the sort of delight with which he might have viewed a beautiful picture or a beautiful piece of sculpture. Her appearance struck him as perhaps the most harmonious he had ever beheld.

Not only were her features and form beautiful according to rule, but in perfect unison with both was the expression of the face and the movement of the figure. In the daily intercourse of a small family circle Grace appeared to her greatest advantage.

She was neither lively nor clever, therefore in mixed society she would be merely noticed for her beauty; but at home, her single-mindedness, her simplicity, her freedom from all wish to dazzle, outshine, or attract, made her perfectly loveable.

She would sit of an evening in one or other of the deep window recesses, listening to the discussions going on between the gentlemen, with great but unobtruding interest, or leave her book or work at any one's call to join in their pursuit or amusement, as if it were her nature to think of others, never of herself. Who was there who could accuse Grace of selfishness?

Thrown so unexpectedly into familiar contact with this delightful creature, was it wonderful that Mr. Miller's slumbering heart was awakened? That in the effort

to penetrate whether she were as morally as she was physically perfect, he should come to believe that her personal beauty was but the outward sign of her lovely soul. Could he discover any plague spot? any craving for admiration, or excitement, any restlessness? Did he ever hear a word that he could liken to discontent, or envy, or jealousy? His heart answered, no, to every one of these interrogations.

Was it wonderful that he began to long for a domestic tie, about which he had for years abstained from thinking? Was it wonderful that the new hopes which were stirring his languid heart, should give animation to his countenance, and a winning tone to his voice?

As yet neither tumultuous doubt nor anxiety disturbed his happy contemplations,

his calm enjoyment of *her* presence ; he could grant himself the rapture of seeing the large serious eyes raised inquiringly to his, and the colour in her cheek deepen with interest as she followed out his meaning.

The only alteration Mr. Miller wished for, was that she would be less silent with him ; he puzzled himself why she should be so, and made himself anxious about it, as people do who wish for explanations without having the right to ask for any. It could not be that there was unwillingness to converse with him in particular : he watched her too closely not to perceive that though her eyes were gradually less often directed to him, she was always quite aware of his presence. He saw, though no one else did, little preferences granted to himself ; *he* might lean

against her chair, or play with the articles in her work-box without her being fidgetted, as she evidently was, if any other person did the same.

These were trifles, indeed ; but they were like the minute particles of ore that lead the experienced miner to the knowledge of the treasure deeply buried, from ordinary observation.

From the antecedents sketched of Grace's history, it was natural that she should look with a sort of terror on anything approaching to a common show of regard from any gentleman. One of the worst effects of treachery, and particularly of treachery in the most delicate of human relationships, is the after impossibility of the betrayed ever feeling again spontaneous confidence ; is the arid distrust in one's own kind, which

usurps the place of the former foundation-stone of undoubting faith. Treachery is a burning ploughshare, scorching and blackening the sweet flowers of the soul.

But there was nothing about John Miller to alarm Grace. There were no small attentions, no furnishing of flowers, no shawlings, no engrossing of her conversation, not the slightest attempt at gallantry, to be summed up against him.

No, it would rather have seemed that he scrupulously avoided any of the usual demonstrations of admiration.

Nevertheless, his quickened eye was always aware of what she was doing; his quickened ear was always alive to everything she was saying; nor was she quite unconscious (what woman would be?) how sedulously, though unobtrusively, he watched

over her ; how, at one time it was an open window that might be injurious to her, which was quietly closed ; or how, though he drew back if any other man, and more particularly if Oscar came forward to pay his devoirs, John Miller was yet always at hand to assist her in any need, or prevent her feeling herself overlooked.

The very circumstance of his age, often silently mourned over by him, told in his favour.

No young creature—at least, no young creature such as Grace was—could help feeling honoured by such observance from one to whom she naturally looked up with respect.

It was, therefore, exactly John Miller being himself, exactly the absence of all the showy marks of man's homage to

woman, exactly the daily interchange of silent sympathies, that was covering his approach to the citadel of Grace's affections.

It would not be credited, if ever so strongly insisted on, that three sisters would not remark any departure from a brother's fixed habits, that they would overlook his lingering over a breakfast-table, or sauntering on a lawn, when it had been that brother's wont for ten years and more, to mount his horse at a fixed hour every morning, Sundays excepted, and take himself off to his business; nor would it be natural in them not to observe his returning home each day five minutes sooner; and any child can calculate how soon such a per-centage on his working hours would amount to one hour; nor

could they fail to observe his constant presence in the drawing-room of an evening, an unasked renunciation of his reading chair, his book, and the classic silence of his library.

As little did they pass over Grace's quick acquiescence to remain another week at Ashburn, when, at Flora's instance, the prolongation of her visit had been proposed. To say that the Miss Millers were perfectly and comfortably acquiescent, and shut their eyes, and opened their mouth for whatever manna Providence might see fit to send them, would be making them out monsters of sisterly perfection.

They talked possibilities and probabilities over pretty keenly; and it must be owned that Miss Minnie was most indignant at brother John's thinking of so young a

person, sixteen, or, at least, fifteen years younger than himself. Did he expect happiness, or quiet, or a companion ?

She pitied poor Maggie with all her heart instead, and obeyed her elder sister in abstaining from "speaking to John before it was too late."

"Interference always does harm, and the girl is a good girl, luckily, but too young for John," said Miss Miller ; "she goes next week, and then he may forget this fancy ; we need not ask her back ; a drive in the morning occasionally will prevent her from fancying us unkind."

Mrs. Maynard had her idea, which was, that Mr. Hitzig was much nearer a proposal than brother John.

"John is so lazy and shy," remarked Mrs. Maynard, "that unless she helps, he'll

never bring himself up to the mark ; he'll just go on admiring her ; and one can't very much wonder if he does. As for Oscar, I think he's a fish, with no blood in his veins, to be so insensible. Grace is really a dear good girl ; she will never propose to anyone, I am sure. It's a pity old Hitzig has such white hair, otherwise he doesn't look his age. These quiet girls have all the luck," sighed Mrs. Maynard.

"What a blessing for her, if she only knew it—rich, a bachelor, and no children," said Miss Miller, meaning Mr. Hitzig, of course.

"That's going too far !" laughed Mrs. Maynard ; "no girl in her senses could ever hesitate between the two men, though John has a child."

"But you don't consider, Anne Maynard,

there's the mother, and a little niece, besides some sort of a humble friend; what's to be done with them I should like to know. However, I shall wash my hands of the whole business. Such a toil and trouble as I have had with this house for the last ten years no one can tell but myself."

Mrs. Maynard wisely passed this ebullition without notice, only answering—

"How your imagination gallops, sister; time enough when evils do come, to vex oneself."

"Ah! but I can see it in John's eye; he is growing upright, too," said Miss Minnie.

"Oh, what a deal of mischief that horrid flirt, Sylvia Birch, has done."

"Who?" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, opening her eyes very wide.

Poor Miss Miller! she was forced to con-

vict herself of having brought Grace to Ashburn from selfish motives.

The whole story tickled Mrs. Maynard amazingly, to think that her prudish sisters should have resorted to such a stratagem.

"You see, dear sister," said Mrs. Maynard, slyly, "this proves that one is apt to find byepaths rather full of pitfalls; but as it is, there's not much mischief done. Really I can't pity you much, only I am glad my dear sister-in-law to be, is such a loveable thing."

"Don't talk in that way," said Miss Minnie; "it's enough to bring a judgment on us."

The Miss Millers, after this conversation, were a trifle less cordial to Grace, but they abstained, on principle, from any overt acts of prevention.

Grace was quite unaware of their revolution of feeling towards her, having taken greatly to escaping after breakfast to wander by the side of a pretty brown babbling brook, that ran its course at the extremity of the Ashburn grounds. She would stand on the shady bank lost in thought, and fancy herself admiring the effect of the sunlight on the white stones high above the shallow water. There was nothing very definite or precise in her amusement, but there was no one by to trouble her for a definition. Her thoughts were calm, happy thoughts ; there was no impatience in them, no anxious looking forward. The only decided idea she had was, that this was the most beautiful summer she ever remembered ; the trees were more peculiarly green, and cast thicker and more refreshing shades ;

the breeze was softer, the sky bluer and clearer. Grace felt as if she loved everything her eyes fell on. Thus it was that her mornings were spent in Dream-land.

In the evenings there were sunset walks, or twilight talks on the broad steps running along that side of the old-fashioned house opening on the lawn. Orange trees, in great blue china tubs, were placed at intervals on the steps, and pomegranates. The red and white flowers of the two shrubs looked like sunlight and moonlight; there the Ashburn party congregated to watch Flora's progress in archery. She was preparing for an impending toxophilite meeting at Deepdene.

The talk was desultory but rich; Mr. Hitzig had read everything worth reading, seen everything worth seeing; had reflected

as well as read and seen, and was at other times quite a match for John Miller. But the favour of an audience doubles any orator's powers, and Mr. Miller, giving out the long stored-up wealth of his brain, did so with a delicious consciousness of the interest he excited, and that made every word he said full of eloquent meaning, almost amounting to inspiration.

The two gentlemen ran a tilt for the gentle girl's smile; and so warmed up was their cold, lazy brother John at Grace's side, that the three sisters had no longer a doubt that a new era in their lives was at hand.

But John Miller was not contented with this peaceful, dreamy happiness, or he wanted a little more of it. The recollection of these sunsets and twilights preyed on his mind; and one day, in his banker's room at Twis-

ton, he was seized with such an irresistible desire to go home a full hour earlier than usual, that after five minutes' deliberation as to what his sisters would think, he passed the Rubicon.

Certainly, it was not yet four o'clock when John Miller had his hand on the lock of the drawing-door at Ashburn, guided thither by the laughter and hum of young voices. He looks in and sees Grace on the music stool, one hand on the keys of the piano, striking a few idle notes, Oscar standing by her side, with eyes, as brother John feels convinced, denoting love, admiration, and happiness. Brother John saw, as people usually see when their judgment is confused by mental discomfort, a great deal more than Captain Oscar's blue eyes had any intention of expressing. The sen-

timentality of Captain Oscar's eyes was always leading people to accuse him falsely ; they were a bane very often to his comfort, but not to his peace of conscience.

Then Mr. Miller was altogether blind to Flora's presence, and rashly jumping to the conclusion that he had interrupted a pleasant *tête-à-tête*, he retreated quite precipitately.

Grace had seen Mr. Miller ; that was not very wonderful, considering his size and the daylight ; but what was rather extraordinary, Grace, not being supernaturally gifted, had also discovered his annoyance and the reason thereof, in the very small space of a minute, and had reddened with vexation, for that flush on her cheeks far exceeded the limits of a blush. She became deaf and dumb on the instant, and did not hear one

word of the fine martial description Captain Oscar was giving of the battle of Aliwal, in which "midst the roar and boom of a hundred cannon, and the cold blue glitter of myriads of bayonets," Oscar had received the very bullet Miss de Witt so respected.

CHAPTER II.

THE Banker, after closing the drawing-room door, took refuge in his library,—a grave, not to say grim, room, and one quite in accordance with his present temper of mind. The walls are covered to the height of six feet with handsome, well-filled book-cases, and the tables are loaded with periodicals, prospectuses, and circulars.

Parish business and municipal minutes are there in profusion—having been rather overlooked lately—letters on wine duties, decimal coinage, on the laws of health, on hydropathy, homœopathy, on railway reform,—in short, on every conceivable and inconceivable topic, are lying in scores on the tables, looking very much unread indeed; and peeping from under some pamphlets heavy with information, is a gaily-bound little book, shattered in the binding, as if very much read, with some such out-of-the-place look as a peacock has in a cloister.

The evenings on the terrace have shown John Miller to be a reading man; all that is therefore necessary to say further on that subject is, that he received his education at Eton and Oxford, and fairly earned a

reputation as a scholar ; and until lately, this room of books was his Elysian field.

In that easy chair, with his head thrown back, and his heavy eyelids down over his dreamy eyes, John Miller sits lost in painful thoughts ; he is wondering, as all of us do, in moments of disappointment or physical depression, if happiness, rational happiness, is an unattainable good in this world ; he is thinking of the past, and of how brightly life opened for him. Memory has carried him over the gulf of fourteen years, and has placed before him two scenes of varied character.

A sweet summer day, and a handsome smiling girl standing beside him ; its pendant a dark procession filing down the avenue, and the wail of a motherless child wounding his ear.

From grief active John Miller had lapsed into grief passive, and emerged from both as taciturn as a Red Indian, hiding treasures of feeling, and treasures of knowledge and fancy under a cold, negligent manner.

Passing his days in the stuffy, musty solitude of a banker's private room, and his evenings in a family circle, where there was no space to deploy his mental forces, he had naturally acquired a sort of morbid contempt for mankind in a general way, while it would have been difficult to find a more pitying heart, a more fruitfully benevolent "Yes" for man individually.

Warm hearts and fine intellects, however they may be paralysed for a time by great suffering or uncongenial atmosphere, are not therefore totally quenched; they recover

their elasticity and energy as soon as some favourable circumstance electrifies their benumbed faculties, and the meeting with Grace had been the spell to rouse John Miller from his apathy.

He is taking at this moment a discouraging view of his personality, but he is doing so as a lover, not as a misanthrope.

He stretches out his hands as though he would repel some image haunting him, shakes his head as though in dissent to some proposition.

The pantomime means—"Can I dare to allow myself to contemplate such an angel as within my reach?—I, who am a man, whose next birthday signs with thirty-nine years?—a man matured in years, and yet more in sorrows?"

"Poor little dove!" he goes on saying to himself, "I am a cold-blooded fellow indeed, to think so much of myself, and not to remember I may cause you pain by my selfish passion. My darling!"—he called her so in his heart—"if I am fit for nothing else, I can be your true friend, and help to smooth your path through life."

The banker stood up, as one resolved to dismiss an importunate visitor, but with rather a melancholy face, it must be allowed, and he sees the gaily-bound little book.

Some association of ideas may be, or perhaps mere curiosity made him take it up. "Oscar Miller" was on the fly-leaf, in the sprawling writing appropriate to that gentleman's station in life as one of her Majesty's dragoons.

The sober banker compares it with the

periodicals, prospectuses, circulars, and reports encumbering his table, and feels how far asunder his pursuits are from those of youth. He takes to shaking his head sadly once more, and then turning to the title-page, he reads—

“Look not mournfully into the past—it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present—it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart.”

I wonder if any one there be, who has not more than once in their lives been consoled or encouraged,—much the same thing after all,—by reading some chance phrase in some chance book.

How many failing hearts have been nerved afresh by the proverb, “Perseverance overcometh all difficulties.”

Not strictly applicable to John Miller's case were Longfellow's beautiful words, but sufficiently so to go home to the banker's troubled heart, like the words of a friend.

And so he sat down again and read on in the small book, till the dinner-bell rung out its warning, and then he went to dress, rather anxious than otherwise to meet the "shadowy future."

Grace was not quite her placid self when she went to dress for dinner, that is to say, she was very much distressed. She was certain Mr. Miller was displeased. She saw it very distinctly ; and he was so good and kind, and thoughtful of every one, it was a shame to do the least thing to displease him. She would not give up his esteem for all the world. She

knew he was so sensitive on the score of women's behaviour. She had seen it with respect to Flora ; she wished with every vein of her heart that Captain Miller would get some one else to play his accompaniments, *she would not* any more—she had suffered enough, and she was determined to walk quietly and happily through the world as she was now doing, and have dear excellent friends.

Suddenly the thought struck her that perhaps Mr. Hitzig had been speaking about Frank's going to Hamburg, and that Mr. Miller quite justifiably had set her brother and herself down as deceitful and ungrateful.

Mr. Hitzig meant very kindly, but she did really wish that he would leave them alone—changes were never for the better

never, and she thought it wrong to be constantly arranging for the future.

Darling Grace! I am afraid you were thinking "Sufficient for the day is the happiness thereof,"—it was involuntarily, if you did.

With the flush of vexation still on her face, Grace went down to the drawing-room, and occupied with her own fancied faults, turned such an anxious pair of eyes on John Miller, as brought him at once to her side, and put him in such good spirits that he was not a bit like the melancholy man of the library.

The grounds of Ashburn were extensive, and quaintly laid out; there were greensward and wood, shrubbery, and parterres, in well balanced variety, the most had been made of the brown brook, babbling and rustling

as it laved the roots of the long line of giant ashes: the brook and the trees had given the pretty name of Ashburn to the domain.

This brook had once rolled along, a deep, noiseless rivulet, but it now prated of the loss of its waters, carried away to feed sundry stone basins in which sported gold and silver fish, in defiance of fountains in the centre, shooting up long liquid arches.

There were thickets of roses, and paths between hedges of laurels and bays, leading to dark cool grottoes, in which you might rest and defy the sultriness of the hottest July day, or pass through, and emerge with glad surprise from their twilight obscurity, upon the gayest pageantry flowers can form.

The grottoes were constructed by the late Mr. Miller, who had borrowed the idea from some he had seen in princely gardens in the north of Italy.

Seizing an opportunity when Mr. Miller was near her, Grace in a kind of desperation plunged into a history of Mr. Hitzig's offer for Frank, with a running commentary of how glad and sorry she was, finishing off with an abortive effort to explain that she wished Mr. Miller to be umpire, and not think either Frankie or herself ungrateful.

He heard her to the end in silence, and then answered in a low grave voice,—

"I am afraid, I must say that your brother ought to accept of Mr. Hitzig's offer. In the bank here, he is one of the

juniors ; and there are many before him, grey heads with long and honest service, and besides there is no relationship to excuse undue promotion."

This was what John Miller said aloud to her ; to himself it was, " What an absurd world this is ; here am I, yearning towards this delicate creature with all tenderness ; I would gather her as the flower of my life, and wear her in my heart of hearts ; at any rate, I would give—no use to be particular how much—to make her happy in her own way ; and I am compelled to talk like a man of marble."

And Mr. Miller gave an impatient tap to a lovely little deity of that particular geological formation he chanced to find at hand.

" Then I will beg Mr. Hitzig to talk

to Frank," said Grace, accepting the award.

Mr. Miller continued as silent though not as hard as marble; that low voice would never be one to dominate the loud buzz of a crowd, but it would be sufficient for a home circle, it had been sufficient to awake new life in his bosom.

There was no more said between them until Grace's exclamation of "How beautiful! oh, how beautiful!" roused John Miller from listening any longer to his own heart. The tone was cheerful of the involuntary "how beautiful," as they stepped out of the grotto, and looked upon a galaxy of "earth's stars" with the last shimmer of daylight on them.

For the first time in his life John Miller's heart gave a great heave of gratification at

being the possessor of that charming place. It was his to bestow on her; is it not the first thing a man who loves wishes to do, to lavish all he has upon his idol, to sacrifice treasures, if he has them, for her? Since John Miller had opened his mind to himself, he was making great onward strides in passion.

"I am rich," thought he; "I can gratify every desire of her heart. I can shelter her and hers from every rough blast."

Ay, he, the good man, considered the afflicted mother of the woman he was beginning to adore, to have sacred claims on him. If Grace could only have known this!

His large, melancholy eye was on her, as she exclaimed, "How beautiful!" but he missed the look of serenity he had

always seen on her countenance; the trace of bygone care, of present agitation, came out again between the brows, and the lips had a little saddened droop.

Moved by an emotion for which he had no words, Mr. Miller offered Grace his arm, and then, after a few steps in silence, he said—

“You must try and accept this meeting with Mr. Hitzig as a good omen; it may be the turning-point of your brother’s fortune.”

He was looking down as he spoke, and saw the quivering of the muscles round the mouth was too great to allow of any answer.

“Your brother,” continued the banker, in a voice so changed no one would have known it for his, so thick the utter-

ance with emotion, that it was a revelation of his soul, "your brother has hitherto shown very resolute persevering steadiness, but he is just coming to the age when despondency as to his prospects may creep over him, when the future looks formidable to the bravest, compelled to trust entirely to his own exertions."

"I understand it better now," said Grace; "but how soon do you think it must be?"

"I dare say Hitzig would allow two months for preparations. I will bring Frank home with me to-morrow, and we can have a long talk over the matter."

This *we* slipped out quite naturally. It marked an epoch in Grace's life, though all she was aware of was a sud-

den lifting away of half her load of anxiety. "Thank you," was the simple answer, with great rest and confidence in the lovely eyes.

CHAPTER III.

THE Maynards are gone to the archery meeting, accompanied by John Miller and the Captain. The house seemed strangely dull to Grace, even astonishing so. The Miss Millers worked and talked as usual, but Grace was not attending to what they said, and if particularly called on by name, answered by a smile, intended to cover her

inattention. One subject of her thoughts was, "Why no one had proposed her going to Deepdene? Was it, then known—her former engagement to Dr. Mansell?"

Grace was sorely troubled by this idea. At last she was roused from her meditations by Miss Miller's heavy hand on her shoulders.

"Suppose, my dear Miss Lloyd, when the carriage comes back, you take a drive and see how they are all getting on at home? The horses are out at any rate, so James coachman can't find any excuse."

Grace, while putting on her bonnet, might have reproached herself for feeling so listless, in preparing to go and see them at home, after a whole month's absence; it is even possible that Grace sighed a little

sigh at the recollection that soon her pretty room would know her no more. In her excuse, be it said, that she saw Frankie often, and knew from him that mamma, and Nelly, and Vick were well.

A pang of self-reproach did punish her when she saw the joy her visit brought to the little household.

Nelly sprung into her arms, and even Mrs. Lloyd tried to stand up and embrace her.

Grace re-seated her mother, placing herself on the stool at her feet, laying aside the bonnet which she saw annoyed Mrs. Lloyd.

The palsied hands sought to smooth the slightly ruffled hair, as had been the custom of happier days.—Mrs. Lloyd was certainly improving in health.

"She has been very comfortable and quiet, dear," said Vick, "and Susan has been most considerate. Have you enjoyed yourself, dear?—you look pale."

Mrs. Lloyd touched her daughter's cheek, and repeated, quite articulately—

"Pale! pale!"

"I have been very happy, mamma."

Mrs. Lloyd leant forward to hear the words better.

"You are glad I have been happy, mamma, are you not?"

Mrs. Lloyd shook her head.

"I am coming home in four days to stay, and *never* go away again, mamma. You can spare your Grace for four little days more, can't you, mamma?"

Grace was very anxious that her mother should not shake her head again; for if

she did, Grace neither must nor would leave her.

Luckily for the success of Grace's petition, Miss Vick's tender "houm! houm!" drew off Mrs. Lloyd's attention.

"Ah, poor dear! she misses you, dear Miss Grace, though every one has been so kind, Mr. Monypenny"

Grace, who was looking at Miss Vick, felt her mother plucking at her sleeve, and turning her head, saw Mrs. Lloyd shaking her fist at Vick angrily, and nodding her head very significantly.

"Can you make out what mamma means, Miss Vick?" asked Grace, puzzled by this strange pantomime.

"Oh, my dear!" and here Vick's head reclined to the left side in her old fashion—"I can't precisely take upon me to explain

your good mother's ways, for indeed she did the same quite boldly the other evening to poor Mr. Monypenny, and he was quite alarmed."

Grace was inclined to be alarmed also, for now Mrs. Lloyd was laughing,—a thing she had not done since that terrible day at Violet Bank.

"I think dear Mrs. Lloyd remarks what goes on in a way now she did not used to do; and as to Mr. Monypenny's visits, why, you know, Miss Grace, I can't take on me to say what would be highly indelicate and improper for me to put in his head. The world will be scandalous Mag, you know, dear, as Mrs. Petersen said. But I shall be glad when you come back, dear, then no one can say a word against any one's visits."

The idea of stout, burly Mr. Monypenny and poor Vick requiring her as a chaperone, made Grace hide her face in Nelly's fat, dimpled shoulders. When she could speak gravely, she said—

“ You have had visits from Mr. Hitzig also ; how do you like him ? ”

“ A very kind gentleman, but rather hasty. I was afraid of your poor dear mother's head—his voice, you know ; but she was vastly taken with him, I can tell you. She held his arm, and walked to the cabinet to show him her silver Honesty.”

“ But what did he say about your money business ? ”

“ He said it would be all right ; he did not condescend to talk it over with me like Mr. Monypenny, but seemed rather huffy

when I wanted to explain *why* I cared about having money, and said, in a very odd way, he supposed everybody wanted it, and could not do without it, and that was how there were robberies. My dear, I felt as if he were accusing me of wishing to rob him; it was very disagreeable. Now, Mr. Monypenny is so considerate."

Grace had a private interview with big Susan, who was not in her mildest mood.

"Yo 'ave been gone three weeks last Lord's Sabbath; my mind is, yo 'ad better come 'ome."

"I shall be back on Monday morning, Susan; this has been my first 'out,' you know, since we came here."

"Fust or last, Miss Lloyd, it be all one when it doon't be right. Yo' are wanted

to look arter some on us ; yoong 'uns be a deal more reasonabler as old 'uns ; when so be they passes their fiftieth, they gets worserer as 'em as 'asn't."

As the carriage rolled on its backward course towards Ashburn, leaving mills, chimneys, smoke, and swelter behind, Grace, in spite of a little self-accusation, felt her spirits rising, and when she actually caught the first peep of the many-peaked top of the dwelling of John Miller, her heart gave a little leap of joy.

Mr. Hitzig was sunning himself on the broad terrace lying to the right of the carriage drive, and hurried forward to hand Grace out of the britzka, ready with kindly questions about her mother, about his fair enemy, and the pretty little child, three of the most helpless of God's creatures he

thought he had ever seen congregated under one roof.

“He is very kind,” thought Grace; “but I wish he would let me go in;” for Grace, though not given to vain imaginings in general of her own attractiveness, was yet too much of a woman, not to be very much on her guard lately in accepting too many of Mr. Hitzig’s cousinly attentions.

They had so entirely discussed her mamma, Vick, and Nelly, not even omitting an eulogium on Mrs. Petersen, and a reference to her brother in India, that Grace grew more than ever desirous to escape, and had already one delicate foot on the front step when Mr. Hitzig resolutely addressed her, with a detaining hand on her shawl, as if he feared her running away.

"Hölde cousine," said the usually fluent gentleman, with a face of such changing hues, as made Grace excessively nervous, and then he came to a full stop.

The young lady waited.

"I see that Flora,—Miss Maynard I beg her pardon, has a great many *coïfichets*, and she sets great store by them all; young girls do, and they are quite right—you like pretty things, eh?"

Grace was very much puzzled; perhaps, instead of what she had supposed, he was going to offer her some ornaments; turquoises, perhaps even diamonds, so she replied gravely, that she did like pretty things.

"So do I," said the Hamburg banker, "I like pretty things;" then suddenly, "Grace, if you will go with Frank and

me to Hamburg, you will make me very happy. Every one can go, Grace, my dear, you shall never know trouble again, and I'll do just as you like."

The red face was grown very white, but not so white as that of the distressed *hölde cousine*, who answering without ceremony, "Oh! no! I thank you," ran quickly up the house steps, and the stairs, nor felt herself safe till within her own room, the door locked, nay double locked, in her nervousness.

Throwing herself into a big old chair, Grace untied her bonnet strings, and instantaneously did what every young lady does on the like occasion, burst into a fit of hearty crying.

Grace was not a girl for ever on the point of shedding tears, and to say the truth,

Mr. Hitzig was only the determining cause of the present shower, sundry little pin-pricks of annoyance of which the day had been fertile, having their share (as well as Mr. Hitzig's avowed fondness for a particular pretty thing,) in the crystal drops rolling off her cheeks.

She indemnified herself in the present instance for the morning's abstinence and with such forgetfulness of consequences, as to be shocked when the toilet glass revealed a pair of eyelids swollen and purple, and a face all colours.

"What will they think, downstairs?" said Grace mentally, as she plunged the sad countenance into cold water; "how very odd people are. I am so sorry, poor Mr. Hitzig, I shall never forget his face, how dreadfully pinched his nose was at

the point! Who would, or who could have thought such a clever man—oh! dear me!”

The cold-water application was a failure, and Miss Grace Lloyd had to descend to the drawing-room with blemished beauty, and otherwise most uncomfortable.

“I hope,” began Miss Miller, in her sharp, cheerful voice, then drew up at sight of Grace’s tell-tale eyes, continuing in a most compassionate whisper—“No bad news, I hope, my dear Miss Lloyd.”

“Mamma seems to me much better, thank you.”

Miss Miller is astonished, but, of course, is too polite to ask why the young lady has made such a figure of herself.

The dinner was like all dinners when something is wrong with one or other of the company.

Mr. Hitzig's face is rather mottled, but no one remarks or connects that with Miss Lloyd's white cheeks and red eyes; he descants on the bouquet in the centre of the table; he likes pretty things, as we know.

Miss Minnie is flattered by this admiration; and says in the temporary absence of the individual himself, that really she "must say the butler has great taste, and is excessively fond of flowers, and is remarkably ingenious in arranging them—more so than the gardener; though I don't mean to say anything against him, poor man! he's a very respectable person, with such a large family; but Hering, our butler, has been with us fourteen—no, thirteen—years, I remember, my dear," [this added in a whisper to Grace] "my brother got him just

at the time of his happiness, poor fellow."

But Grace's mind received very vague impressions from Miss Minnie's confidences ; while her ear was so confused with the sound of *Strelitzia Regina*, *Astroæmeria*, *Pellegrina*, and *Amaryllis*, she would assuredly, had she dared to address the morose-looking object of Miss Minnie's praise, have called him *Amaryllis*, or *Hypericum Longifolium*, the lovely plants the lady was promising to show her after dinner.

Bed-time came at last, and Grace was taking her bed-candle from the slab in the hall, when Mr. Hitzig came to her side, and said—

" Shake hands, Grace. I shall go away to-morrow early. Forgive an old man's

folly. I will take good care of Frank for your sake."

"Oh, pray"

"Hush! it's all over now—good-bye!" And he watches the light, retreating figure up the stair—watches till the light she bore quite disappears.

Grace was in for another cry; she felt herself, for at least a quarter of an hour, a most despicable egotist. Poor dear old man! how she could have loved him as a father.

She puts on her dressing-gown, shakes down her hair—there now, her head feels easier, the tight circle does not press her temples so painfully;—how prettily the moon shines through the diamond lattice—such a quaint pattern it makes on the carpet; the moon rises late to-night.

Captain Miller gave that as one of the reasons for the hurry of the archery meeting—it was to let the guests have light for their long drives home.

The night is not so still as the day has been; there has been a sharp wind ever since the afternoon. Grace looks out at the heavens, where whole troops of clouds in serried ranks are mustered on either side, some outstretched in the van like pioneers, while sharp flashes are rending the dark masses lying low on the horizon. Up comes lady Moon from behind the tall trees, white and placid; she sails among the angry congeries, dividing them like a peacemaker.

Grace sets her thoughts homewards. "Poor Mamma! how gentle and loving she was to-day! Is not that much to be grateful for? and Frank, his fortune almost

made." Here a very tiny sigh; "and dear little Nelly, and poor Vick, all so affectionate and loving to her. Grace is afraid she was not so grateful in the morning for these blessings as she ought to have been; that she cut poor Vick's overflowings about Mr. Monypenny rather short; but really it was a little tiresome to hear an old lady going on in that way. Grace thought "they are as silly as old gentlemen;" then she blushed and laughed quietly to herself, and there was an end of all disposition to cry.

She continued, however, as young ladies will do sometimes, to gaze on at the moon, lost—yes, lost in very profound thought, which lasted, notwithstanding some ungentle puffs of wind, until the roll of wheels disturbed the silence of the avenue. Then Miss Grace Lloyd, in some trepidation,

closes the casement, sits down before the toilette-table, and begins brushing her hair.

In five minutes a finger tirmed at the lock of her door, and a pretty flushed face, with hair all out of curl, looks in.

"May I?" said Flora; "I saw the light in your window as we drove up."

"Oh, yes, do," says Grace, tugging forward a sofa.

"Oh! that's charming!" cries Flora, coiling herself up almost into a ball on it; "I *am* so tired,—such a delightful day—how I wish you had been there, Grace. Goodness, girl! how long your hair is! How well you look! Only fancy, Mrs. Mansell, Sylvia Birch that was, wears her's so, right down to her waist."

"Did you get a prize?"

"Oh, heavens; no! not for shooting, at

least, Miss Grace, though I flatter myself I carried off the prize for something else. Modest that, isn't it? But I *am* glad I am pretty, it makes every one so kind, and smile on one; and it's not a bit worse to be glad of being pretty, than to be glad of being clever or rich—now is it? Though, after all, what is beauty? For there's Sylvia Birch—Mrs. Mansell that is—she hasn't a really good feature, and yet she makes all the men run after her. She's a kind of fairy queen, I suppose. I am sure I don't envy her that husband of hers—such a snob, with diamond studs and that sort of thing. Sylvia, you know, sings like Grisi, so we all went into the gallery to hear her, and we found this Doctor standing before a picture, talking to a stout, vulgarish man. I don't know what they were saying, but:

Sylvia, she gave such a savage look, I quite thought she would spring at her husband's throat.

“‘Look out for squalls,’ says Arthur Vernon.”

“Who is Arthur Vernon?”

“Oh, a duck of a handsome Dragoon—he galoppes like a perfect angel—we had such fun. Sylvia wouldn't sing, after all; and the queer little man at the organ, just like a little grey squirrel, began quarrelling with the big man.

“‘Music is a phenomene sair genius can make mairble breathe,’ says Scotchie.

“‘Song is like the temple of God, made without hands,’ says the little babe.

“‘I'll give Bruin a knee,’ says Arthur; ‘you be bottle-holder to the little one;’ but Clementina Birch came and sent us all back

to the dancing. Such a galloppe as that last one—it *was* heavenly. My dear model of perfection, he's irresistible. But oh, darling! he's only a younger son—quite poor. He told me how bitterly he felt his situation while we were polking."

"Poor man!"

"Now, Grace, I declare you are growing quite satirical. But you'll see him tomorrow."

"Is he coming here?"

"Yes, and no; for oh, light of my eyes! we are going on a pic-nic to Doily Park, to see the wild cattle, and I am to ride his pretty mare—quite accustomed to a side-saddle; his sisters rode it. Sisters, indeed! what monsters men are; but I looked quite innocent. I hope aunts won't go."

"Why?"

"Oh, they watch so, and papa's sure to sleep, and mamma's always nice. Oh, dear, how tired I am! I'll hate you, Grace, if you outshine me to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

THE following morning was fine, though a light mist lay low on the earth. A misty, silent morning, with no sunshine, and no bird's song.

Grace is at her window, wondering if the pic-nic to Doily Castle will take place, when she hears strange voices below, and guesses that Mr. Vernon, with the pret-

tiest mare in the world, has arrived.

She hastened down, not to have to enter the breakfast-room before strangers, and at the foot of the stairs met John Miller, his hat on his head; he stopped directly.

"You will have a beautiful day for your excursion — this mist prophesies a fine day."

"Are you not going with us?" she asked, a little of the same anxious eagerness in her eyes that he had noticed two evenings before.

"I believe you are the only one who has had the civility to suppose my going possible," he replied, laughing.—"Yes, I think I must go, for papa Maynard will be letting you all get into one scrape or

other. I ought to go, to prevent mischief. There is confusion already at the stables. I am on my way now to secure Oscar's dog-cart, to take Hitzig to the station.

Mr. Hitzig, then, was really going away. Grace fancied Mr. Miller looked suspiciously at her. If Mr. Hitzig had told him, it was awkward for her to be as it were turning Mr. Miller's friend out of the house. Mr. Miller, however, was neither looking angry nor broken-hearted.

Breakfast was altogether so disturbed by the advent of Mr. Arthur Vernon and his friend, whose name no one ever found out, as to permit any embarrassment in Grace's manner to pass unobserved. She was painfully alive to Mr. Hitzig's unusual silence and gravity; and when, in

wishing her good-bye, he said — "God bless you, my dear little cousin, remember me as a friend, and believe me, Frank shall be to me as a son;" when the fine large face had smiled on her one instant, and then disappeared, Grace felt as if her day's pleasure were at an end.

"Though lost to sight, to memory dear," whispered some one in her ear, as Grace stood in a melancholy way at a window.

"*Ce n'est qu'un Cousin,*" went on Flora; "so, dear Grace, don't look so sentimental, but come, and get ready. I don't ask your opinion of the master of the mare, dear, because I perceive your taste is for antiquities; but I want you to do me a favour. I am going to ride, so will you put on my white bonnet, instead of that poky straw of yours."

But Grace was obstinate, and would wear her own poky straw, and the pretty, kind-hearted dasher had to yield the point.

The brace of dragoons scarcely remarked the quiet Grace; they took it for granted from her reserve that she must be the governess or humble companion.

A soft breeze had already lifted up the early morning's mist when the Ashburn party set out for Doily Castle. The sky was deep blue, flickered with pillowy white clouds, tinted at the edges with warm yellow. The air was loaded with perfume, and full of that most musical of Nature's murmurs—the busy insect hum.

To the right of the road, shaded by tall poplars, was a canal, its straight lines happily hidden by a succession of brightly painted barges rippling its waveless surface.

To the left were either fields of ripened corn, meadows with drowsy cattle, or lines of cottages, with slips of gardens ; children and dogs basking at the doors ; bustling mothers within preparing the noonday meal.

It was a real English summer's day—a real English country scene—one which would tempt you to fancy that there was nothing but honest, cheerful, well-paid industry in our land, and that such things as want or vice, injustice or misery, were unknown there. The generally pervading repose soothed Mr. Maynard into a gentle doze. Indeed, though the genial state of the atmosphere, and the even rolling of the carriage did not actually send that serene gentleman's companions also to sleep, it evidently made them inclined to reverie.

Mrs. Maynard, always polite, addressed one or two common-place remarks to Grace about its being like a scene somewhere in Holland, inquired if Grace was quite comfortable, then sunk back in her own well-cushioned corner, and was silent. It was this power of being silent that made Mrs. Maynard "so nice," as Flora called it; she never thought it necessary to sit upright in a carriage and applaud the scenery, or otherwise make herself tiresome.

John Miller, seated opposite to Grace, was sensible that he was exactly where he liked best to be; and as far as he could do so without rudeness, gave himself up to the study of the Beautiful, feeling quite extraordinarily pleased, when a tiny zephyr daintily fanned the end of the blue ribbon

on the poky straw bonnet, or the fringe of Miss Lloyd's shawl towards him.

An inconceivable calmness, a fulness of content, wrapped the man about, so that for the time being he had lost sight of his own personality, or that romantic feelings were not in exact keeping with thirty-nine years of age, and one or two silvery threads shining among his black waving hair.

The pleasantest situation, however, cannot last for ever ; so Mr. Maynard was roused from his nap, and looking most gentlemanly, and quite awake, he offered his arm to Grace.

There was an end of all tranquillity when the Countess and her cavaliers joined the carriage party ; a sudden inrush of talk and laughter setting reveries and romance at defiance. Much of importance to the suc-

cess of the pic-nic had to be settled, viz. where and when the provision baskets were to be forthcoming, when and where the carriage and saddle-horses were to pick them up, and last and not least, to tie up Flora's habit.

It is astonishing how differently people contrive to do the same things. Some girls have a way of never liking to give trouble, by which they understand not caring to exact what others call "the attention due to women." Some, again, levy the tax as if it were their duty to do so; some with gay complacency, and of these last was the Countess. Her habit was in danger of keeping her friends and attendants long enough in the sun to risk their receiving a sunstroke, had the pretty trifle not luckily espied the peculiar smile on Uncle John's

lips, and suddenly made herself ready to proceed to the castle.

The road which would take them thither in the most direct line lay before them, but with such a hot glare on it, that there was an unanimous resolution as to the necessity of seeking some shadier, though it should be a more circuitous, route. There was no danger of losing their way, the stately towers of the main building being to be seen far and wide. So our party struck at once into a copse of fir-trees, very stiff, dark, and pungent in smell. It was a great relief to get quite out of the sun.

But the path that had tempted them from the straight road first grew steeper and steeper, and then after they were thoroughly tired of going up and up, suddenly made a precipitous dip down. A pause became

necessary for breath and for reflection. Mrs. Maynard was doubtful of her own powers of locomotion; but Flora, who had no fear and but slight patience, settled the point by waving her whip and crying "Follow me who dares;" and ran heedlessly down the sharp descent, slippery as ice with fallen fir leaves.

As a matter of course, Oscar and the two dragoons obeyed the challenge, but spurs and military heels are treacherous auxiliaries on such occasions, and they were consequently too much occupied striving to keep their feet, to notice that their fair leader was out of sight.

Grace and Mr. Maynard, John Miller and his sister, availing themselves of every friendly twig, even at times embracing the trunk of a tree, were proceeding in tolerable

safety, when a sharp scream from Flora, followed up by several others still sharper, rang through the wood.

“Oh, heavens! my child Flora! oh, John, save my child!” screamed Mrs. Maynard.

A low rumbling, then a loud bellow, explained but too clearly the cause of Flora’s shrieks.

“It’s the bulls—the wild bulls—by George!” exclaimed the young man whose name was never known; and seizing the first support at hand, it happened to be Grace Lloyd’s shoulder, he began climbing up a tree.

John Miller, placing his shrieking sister by her husband’s side, said, “Take care of these two, Maynard,” glancing at Grace and Mrs. Maynard, and then swung himself down, by the help of bush and tree, in

the direction whence proceeded Flora's screams.

Every one was running somewhere, and in the general panic, how it occurred Grace never recollected, she got completely separated from the Maynards.

"I say, you—Miss—" cried a voice suddenly, and appearing to come from above her head, "I say, you'd better bolt."

"Bolt!" cried the terrified girl; "where, where?"

"Come, run, can't you? don't you hear the mad brute crashing up this way? By Jingo! they're driving him right on us!"

These words sent Grace flying she knew not where, and it was a mercy she did not run right on the horns of the furious beast, instead of up to the ruined walls of some former cottage. She crept through a gap.

into the space they enclosed, and believed herself in perfect safety, forgetting that where she entered the bull might do so also.

There was not much time for her to think, however, so close was the enemy on her heels. The magnificent fawn-coloured animal, when he came to the piece of green sward surrounding the place of Grace's refuge, stood for awhile holding his nose high in the air, snuffing the breeze; then suddenly lowering his head, made a blind dash at the gap, but missed it.

Grace, in the desperation of her terror, clambered to the top of the wall, endeavouring to steady herself there with her parasol.

"Where can they all be, that she is left alone in such peril?" but her tongue lite-

rally clove to the roof of her mouth ; she could not have uttered a cry, had her life depended on it.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Miller had met Oscar and Mr. Vernon carrying the poor Countess, who had escaped the bull, but had fainted outright.

"Where's Miss Lloyd gone?" he asked, instantly missing her from the group that gathered round Flora.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Maynard in his turn; "what has become of Miss Lloyd?"

"I say, she's bolted to the right. I saw the bull giving chase to her," issued from the top of a tree close by; "there, don't you hear him? he ain't far off—you'd better be quick."

A low bellow had signified the bull's

disappointment to Grace; his large eye is turned on the trembling girl, barely out of his reach, he paws the earth, retreating backwards, as if to gain room for his attack.

John Miller did not say a word in reply to his obliging informant up the tree, "but made uncommon good play with his long legs," as that look-out announced. "He swings himself like a kangaroo, pretty fast I can tell you, and no mistake."

Oscar ran after his brother, in spite of Mrs. Maynard's wild entreaties that every one would not go away, and leave her alone, with poor little Flora. Mr. Maynard and Mr. Vernon standing by her even, while she spoke.

"Don't be mad, Jack," shouts Oscar, in the peril of the moment using boyhood's

familiar name. "The brute will play old Tommy with us, if we don't get some of the keepers to help. I say, old fellow, mind what you're about, keep the trunk of a tree between you and the savage, till I come back."

Like all good advice, little heeded. To see the darling of his soul almost within reach of a furious bull is enough to make any man, who is a man, feel himself a Sampson.

Had he been the trained *chulo* of a hundred bull-fights John Miller could not have made a more brilliant dash out from among the trees than he now did, shouting and waving his silk pocket-handkerchief, having no gay mantle at command.

The bull immediately faced about on his

daring assailant, and without loss of time rushed on him at full speed.

John Miller fled to the trees, and so close was the bull on him at one moment, that he bore off on his horns the fluttering silk-handkerchief.

Perhaps Mr. Miller owed his escape to the frantic cries with which Grace, whose tongue was now unlocked, filled the air. For no sooner did the bull hear those shrill sounds, than he abandoned his pursuit of the gentleman to turn his attention to the young lady.

Tossing his thick forelock aloft, and writhing his tail most viciously, the bull pauses to eye her, as bulls usually do the object of their intended attack.

Then putting down his head with mouth foaming, nostrils red and wide, away he

goes, not at his first antagonist, who is clapping his hands and whistling in an unearthly manner, but right at the wall on which Grace stands.

With a bound, that makes John Miller see fire before his eyes, the bull gets his feet on the loose stones at the top, balances his huge body there for a second, such a second! and comes down with a crash that shakes the ground beneath him, rolling over and over.

He is up again in no time, maddened by the fall, and is preparing for another rush, while John Miller, in desperation at Grace's danger, is actually out on the grass, bent on gaining her side, bull or no bull.

Luckily Oscar and some keepers are at hand; they are coming on quickly, in a semicircle, and making known their arrival

by a deafening chorus of holla-ing, hurray-ing, whistling and clashing of sticks, so astounding and distracting, that the bull takes to careering round the ruins, and coming to the gap, bang through he goes.

John Miller, half beside himself, snatches Grace down, and runs away with her to the shelter of the wood.

"Are you hurt? let me hear you speak?" he says breathlessly.

"I am not in the least hurt, indeed I can stand, I am only frightened."

He lets her use her own feet, watching her with the intense earnestness of one who cannot believe that his sight tells him truly; his olive face is bleached white, and the sweat-drops of horror stand thick on his brow.

"I am only frightened," repeated Grace.

"All safe, eh, Miss Lloyd?" called out Oscar. "Capital fun, after all, since no one is hurt," and he threw himself down on the grass, fanning his flushed face with his hat.

Grace might have said "sport to you, but death to me," had she heard him.

John Miller is leading her away, her arm pressed close to his side; he holds back every twig or branch that intrudes on her path, removes every stone, gathers a little flower on which her eye had rested as she passed; he could not speak, no more could she, their hearts were too full. In spite of his lounging walk, their step is as even as if they had walked thus arm in arm for years—it is as slow as the step

of those who have forgotten they have any point to reach.

When they came in sight of Mr. and Mrs. Maynard and the rest, John Miller, trying to be his usual self, said—

“I told you there would be some scrape to-day. It was a mercy I did not trust you entirely to papa Maynard. You are sure you do not feel ill. What a heroine you are—not a bit of a fainting, hysterical young lady.”

And he looked so proudly and approvingly at her.

“Don’t praise me too soon,” said Grace;
“I feel very—very—”

“You must not break down now, for my sake,” he said, in a very low voice. “I could not bear to see you shed tears—I hope I never shall.”

Grace braced up her nerves directly, and bore being made much of by the ladies, and praised by the gentlemen, with composure, particularly as Mr. Miller and Oscar took upon themselves to answer all questions.

"What would have come of you, dear girl," said Flora, "had you fainted as I did?"

"She would have had the honour of a paragraph going the round of the newspapers," said Oscar, with a light laugh.

"It's no subject for jesting," said Mr. Maynard, speaking for once. "All I can say is, that had anything happened to Miss Lloyd, I should have felt guilty of murder. I shall never forgive myself for my stupidity after John's special charge."

Mr. Maynard's energy was nearly as much

of an event as the adventure with the bull.

The keepers had to be rewarded, and this done, they led the party to a place of safety, and in time the servants and the baskets were discovered.

Like every pic-nic that was ever undertaken, it was a failure. Flora tried hard to recover her spirits, and told over and over how she had been right up to the bull. Grace abdicated her rights as the heroine of the day, and John Miller found a new charm in this unobtrusiveness. He had, however, a rival in the young gentleman (name unknown), who seemed to consider he had some sort of right to Grace's attention. He seated himself by her side, saying—

“ Ah, if it hadn't been for me, I don't know

what would have become of *you* ! I told them where to find you ; it's a caution to cats to see how that dark neighbour of yours lays out his long legs when he's in a hurry."

CHAPTER V.

NATURALLY the day's adventure led to relations of all manner of perilous escapes. Captain Miller told a story of how when the regiment was at Misserabad, in one of his morning rides before breakfast, he had discovered a tiger following him,—not more, indeed, than twenty yards in his rear.

"It was by no means comfortable," said Captain Miller, "for I hadn't even a pocket pistol with me; and I was afraid to ride fast lest I should excite the brute; so I tried to keep my horse at a steady, quick walk, not very *easy*, he being in such a devil of a funk—he rippled up his back in a way that almost shook me out of the saddle. Miss Lloyd, you are the only one here who can at all appreciate my position. I am sure you must have felt just as I did, when you were on the top of the wall. Well, on we went—I before, and tiger behind—no turning that I could spy. At last, when I began to think I must try a race—for my nerves couldn't hold out much longer—what should I see but my gentleman slinking away into a marsh we had come to, and hiding himself in the thick

reeds. I suppose he had been making a night of it, and wasn't thinking of me in any way."

"Was that all?" said Flora; "I don't call that anything of an escape."

"I know a better story than that," said the young gentleman, name unknown.—"An old woman—" every one burst out laughing—"Confound it! you might give a man time—"

"Oh, don't stop—pray don't," said Flora.

"Well, it's quite true, you know; it isn't my making up."

"An old woman," prompted Flora.

"An old woman killed a tiger, and she did it this way, you know—They go out to pick up wood in that country you know, and they carry a sharp-pointed

stake with them, to tie it on to—the faggots, you know—and when they are tired, they can stick the stake in the ground, and rest themselves, and get it on their backs again, stooping like, below it. Well, you oughtn't to keep on sniggering so Vernon, it's quite true, a man of ours told me the whole thing."

"Never mind Mr. Vernon," said Flora ;
"I want to know, I really do, how the clever old woman killed the tiger—it's highly instructive."

"Well, Miss Maynard, this old woman, you know, was going home with a great load of faggots, when she came right in front of a great tiger, she did indeed ; and she was so frightened, she took and threw the wood at him, and the point of the stake, you know, went right into his forehead,

and he fell down dead as mutton on the very spot."

"Now that was very nice of the old woman," said Flora, gravely.

"But it's true as Gospel, you know, for the old girl went and got the reward for killing a tiger; I don't know what it was, but it was a reward of some kind, and it happened not so long ago either, when that man, you know who I mean, Vernon"

"Tippoo Saib?" asked Vernon.

"I should have liked it better," said Flora, interposing between Mr. Vernon and the narrator's wrath, "if you had seen it yourself, from the top of a tree, as you did the fight between Miss Lloyd and the bull; for you *did* see that, you know, with your very own eyes."

"I did, indeed," answered the young man briskly. "You'll be dreaming of bulls to-night; now see if you don't," he said, turning to Grace.

The spirits of the party however flagged, from various causes, and though each hesitated to be the first to propose it, there was one general wish to return home.

Mrs. Maynard, who had continued slightly hysterical, insisted on Flora taking John Miller's seat in the britzka; so her brother rode one of the servant's horses, sending the man on with the dragoon's pretty mare, to the barracks, in order not to alarm the Miss Millers.

"I can feel your hand burning through your glove," said John Miller, as he handed Grace from the carriage; "will you follow my advice, and lie down for an hour or two?"

He called it advice, but he spoke very much as one who had a right to order her to take care of herself; and this made Grace more feverish than ever.

She obeyed him, as she would have done had he told her instead to join a singing or dancing party. She was feeling as if she did not care what became of her—paying for the moment of exquisite happiness she had experienced.

When Mr. Miller so opportunely carried away Grace from the enraged and hunted bull, and still holding her very near to him, asked her, in that soul-revealing voice, "Are you hurt?" she scarcely heard the words; but the tone and the expression of his eye sunk deep and strong into her soul.

It was with her as if at that instant a

veil, which had hitherto hid the brightness of the world, had been suddenly lifted up. Surely it was not a human voice she listened to; those were not earthly flowers blooming at her feet.

Her heart quaked, as the human heart always instinctively does in any of the great crises of life. The brightness and the flowers faded even as suddenly as they had appeared.

She has gone upstairs now, and locked herself into her pretty room, and looks round her with tearful eyes of farewell. She has sat down in sadness near the broad casement; and as twilight creeps over sky and earth, thought bears Grace away among the spectres of the past. Their shadowy presence chills her, and makes her clasp her poor little cold hands very tightly. The

spectre of deluded first love is bidding her distrust herself, Mr. Miller, and the whole world,—bidding her refuse again to listen to “things that sound so fair;” man’s love and constancy. Telling her that “the heart hath bubbles, as the water has; and these are of them.”

How was it she had been so happy? It was quite painful to her now, to recollect how happy—quite painful now to recollect how her heart had so instantly sounded in unison with the tone-revealing *his*. Then she recalled certain moods of despondency, she had remarked lately in Mr. Miller; recalled some words that were full of melancholy, that she had wondered at, and been very sorrowful about. And she was conscious, quite conscious now, that she might help to banish this despondency, this melancholy.

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She believed he was going to ask her to do so. And here Grace covers her face again, though she is alone, and her heart beats as if she were frightened ; for she is saying to herself, " He loves me ;" and the brightness that had gleamed on her among the trees, was again forcing its way through the fingers holding down her eyelids. She dared not look at it, lest she should see her first love between her and it.

Grace believed Mr. Miller ignorant of her former engagement to Dr. Mansell ; believed that if he knew it, she must be lowered in his opinion ; why, she would have found it difficult to explain. She was not accustomed to ponder over the mysteries of the heart ; she was too young for that—as yet too much of a player in the game of life, to have the eyes of a looker-on. But she felt

jealous of the past for him, and endowing him with her own sensations, shrunk from giving him the knowledge—exaggerating its importance, like a loving woman as she was—making herself believe it to be a fiery sword of separation.

There is no saying how far Grace might have pursued her mental contradictions, had she not been roused from the task by Flora, who came with a message, that if Grace liked she should have her tea sent upstairs, instead of fatiguing herself by joining the party in the drawing-room.

“Arthur Vernon is gone,” said Flora, “so I am sure we shall be better here than down-stairs.”

Grace was in that state of bewilderment and self-engrossment that she did not remark any anxiety in Flora’s manner,

nor yet consider it strange that neither of her hostesses came up to see her, if they thought her unfit for the slight exertion of drinking tea in their company. She was too thankful for the respite to canvass it.

The self-control forced on her by Flora's presence, ended by restoring some part of Grace's lost equilibrium.

After a silence between the two girls of some duration, Flora said,

"Grace, does it ever come into your head to wonder if any one was ever really happy in this world?"

"I don't think it is possible," answered Grace, quickly.

"But why?—what can be the reason, when every one wishes to be happy—doing every thing they can to be happy?"

"The worst of it," says Grace, quite vehemently for her—and replying to her own thoughts, and not to Flora's question—"the worst of it is, if one makes a blunder once, it is impossible ever to put it to rights. An old friend of mamma's, a Miss de Witt, says that life is a game of chess, a mistake in the first moves generally leads to a check-mate."

"Every one doesn't make a mistake then, or nobody would win," said Flora; "and yet I don't see any one happy but children, and they don't know any thing about it."

Grace sat silent for a minute or two, then said—

"Yes; the game, however, is very long and difficult, and when it's won, it scarcely seems worth the trouble."

Flora looked out of the window.

"What a lovely, lovely night!" she exclaimed; "the world is a beautiful world, Grace, and doesn't look as if there ought to be nothing in it but misery, as if that beautiful starry sky was meant only to be gazed at by tearful eyes. Come and look at it, Grace, and get rid of your dismals."

The two girls, with arms entwined, stood at the open window, as one short month ago they had stood at another, strangers in all except the knowledge of each other's names. Four weeks — eight-and-twenty days—and that had been sufficient to effect an entire revolution in their feelings, their wishes, their sympathies. There was an unexpressed common bond between them this evening, for Flora, for the first time in her life, had left the real matter-of-fact precincts of an amiable egotism, so it ap-

peared, at least, from a style of conversation unusual to her. There was in her an awakened longing to be something better than she was,—a beginning of anxiety; like another Undine, she felt the approach of the power that was to make her a “woman full of affection, and heir to suffering.”

“I wish, I wish,” said Flora, half playfully, half gravely, “that there were no poverty, no tears, no sadness in the world. I don’t believe any one would do wrong or be unhappy if they were not poor.”

“Or did not wish to be rich,” said Grace.

Flora put her arms round Grace’s neck and kissed her softly; it was the first sisterly kiss that had passed between them.

“Dear Grace, that is it; I here, from this moment give up my two ladies’ maids and the worked petticoats, now and for

ever. I'll be tender and true," she sung, but there was more of bashful softness about her than merriment. "Good night, Grace, you don't care for my philosophical resolutions a bit; you are very pale and dismal, Grace. Are you thinking of the hero up the tree who claimed to have saved you? Try and recollect if you do dream about bulls and Uncle John running like any common mortal—a thing I have often heard him declare no man with any self-respect ever does—*Addio, bel idol mio.*"

Left to herself, Grace found that her terrible agitation was calmed; she began to take quite another view of her case, even to be shocked at her excessive certainty about Mr. Miller's intentions towards her. "It was too absurd, because he had been kind to her in a moment of danger, to

suppose he wanted to marry her." She went on: "It's too absurd, because he seems to like to talk to me, that I should fancy him in love with me. Everybody knows that people always avoid those they like best," and so on. She hoped they would be as friendly as before, for it was very pleasant at Ashburn.

Before Grace slept, she had arranged a sensible set speech in case of the worst, and was yet at work at it, when she fell into a restless, feverish sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first words Grace heard on awaking next day were from Miss Miller, who, to Grace's infinite surprise, was seated in a chair by the bed.

"There's nothing wrong, my dear; at least, nothing wrong now."

If the truth had been known, Grace's first terrified thought was, that something dreadful had happened to Mr. Miller.

"Oh! what has happened? Please to tell me at once."

"Don't be so alarmed, my dear Miss Lloyd, the danger is over now. Dr. Mansell assured us of that, or you should have been informed — I am not one for concealments."

Grace's imploring eyes luckily reminded Miss Miller that her listener had yet to learn what was the matter.

"The little girl, your niece, was seized with croup yesterday afternoon, she had been out in the sharp wind the day before. Your brother came for you just after you had gone to lie down, and John insisted it might be the death of you to suffer any more agitation, and would not allow me to call you down. He and I went back with Mr. Lloyd. You might

have heard us return in the middle of the night."

"I did not ; how could I sleep so soundly when my poor little Nelly was ill ? How very kind of you ; but indeed I wish you had taken me with you."

"I was anxious to do so, but men are rather positive creatures, and my brother persisted that you were better out of the way ; and as I said before, when we reached your house, the danger was all over. Dr. Mansell himself told Mr. Miller so."

Dr. Mansell ! twice over Miss Miller had named him, and Grace fancied that each time Miss Miller gave her a peculiar look. Grace had eaten her apple of knowledge the evening before, and she was full of suspicions of herself and of other people.

That name, so long unheard, sounded in

her ears like the raven's croak of evil omen.

"I must go home directly," said Grace, too troubled to weigh her words.

"It's quite natural you should wish it; indeed, I ordered the carriage before I came up to you. I knew you would be anxious to get away."

Miss Miller would have been quite shocked had any one told her that she was very much relieved by this providential interference in John Miller's behalf; but it little mattered what she said or what she felt. Miss Miller's comforting words would have fallen on very deaf ears. The best thing Mr. Miller's eldest sister could do she did; that is, leave Grace alone to dress.

Oh! that she might quit dear, dear Ashburn without seeing him. And the

whole time Grace was thinking of herself as thankful, she felt her heart heavy and sick.

Flora, in her dressing-gown, dashes into Grace's room, to say how sorry she is, and how she knew all about it the evening before, and was so afraid Grace should guess something was the matter, ending by a promise to go and see her every day.

“ But can't Grace come back, if the dear little tiresome child is really out of danger ?”

Grace answered by a shake of the head, because she cannot trust herself to speak, and the shake seems so sad a one to Flora, that the bright eyes are brim-full of tears directly. Flora is very much gentler than she was. She exclaimed,—

“ I shall always write to you, dear Grace, as long as I live, wherever I may be. How

I wish you and Oscar had fallen in love with one another, it would have been so nice."

Grace feeling more dead than alive, goes down the large staircase and sees Mr. Miller pacing gravely up and down the hall, not with his hat on, as, yesterday morning, but very distinctly waiting for some one, and she feels sure that some one is herself. Her heart first leaps up with joy, then sinks down with sadness.

"The danger is over," he began, taking her hand with the same air of proprietorship he had used towards it, the evening before ; "but I can understand that you feel it to be your duty to go and see after your little charge."

"You have been so very kind," Grace forced herself to say, "I don't know how to thank you."

"Have I been so very kind?"

He was walking away with her, not to the front door, but into his private library.

"Of what are you afraid?" he said tenderly, as he felt her hand fluttering within his grasp.

The words were spoken in the voice thick with emotion she had heard once before.

"Miss Lloyd,—no, why not, Grace, dear Grace, you guess, do you not, what I have brought you here to listen to?" He spoke so fondly, and yet in so frank and manly a manner.

"Will you trust me with this precious thing, Grace?" holding the small hand firmly to his breast.

Grace was striving to remember the

beginning, any part indeed of her well-arranged speech.

"Come, won't you let me hear the sound of your voice?"

Silent she stood, with her head turned from him, and not the silence was it, that implies consent.

Mr. Miller involuntarily loosened his hold of her hand; and she hurriedly withdrew it, clenching the fingers like one in bodily pain.

"Will you not speak to me, Miss Lloyd?"—it was no longer Grace in that tender tone.

Unable to disentangle one of her overnight's thoughts, and yet obliged to speak, she burst out with—"You don't know;" then came to a full stop. As Mr. Miller said not a word, Grace looked up

with tearful eyes, saying—"Pray forgive me!"

"Forgive you!" repeated Mr. Miller, in astonishment. "Forgiveness is not a word for you to use to me, Miss Lloyd."

Mr. Miller had a man's horror of scenes, but he had something more—he had a dread of them: his short married life had taught him that his was a nature to be fearfully tortured and disturbed, but never to be relieved by them; and further, that he was not one easily to recover from the alarm they inflicted on him.

The repose and the absence of all excitability or impetuous impulsiveness about Grace had been what first so greatly attracted him. There is, perhaps, nothing which so soon induces a relying on another as a reserve of manner.

Grace's tearful eyes and growing agitation, therefore, rather surprised and repulsed than softened Mr. Miller; he could not understand this sudden change from what she was only the day before: he did not like seeing her stand like a criminal before him.

Perceiving that she either could not or would not speak, he said—

“I am sorry to be giving you so much pain.”

“It is not you, indeed it is not that,” said Grace, “I meant to tell you.” (Here Maggie's voice was heard calling—“Miss Lloyd!—Miss' Lloyd!”) “I must go, indeed.” And Grace moved towards the door.

“Allow me.” And he opened it for her.

"Oh, here you two are!" shouted Maggie.

"Papa, may I go with Miss Lloyd?"

"If Miss Lloyd would like it."

"She'll say, yes; she never says, no; do you, Miss Lloyd?"

"You will find my sisters here;" and Mr. Miller left Grace.

"Dear me, Miss Lloyd, you look very faint."

"She's been saying good-bye to papa in the library," said Maggie, "and they both of them say I may go in the carriage."

"Try and swallow a cup of tea, Miss Lloyd," said Mrs. Maynard, "I find it settles my nerves. I am sure I hope you will find your fears quite unfounded.

Children get soon ill and soon well."

Under this shelter Grace drank her cup

of tea, while Miss Miller hid her uneasiness by calling to Maggie to come off the wet grass,—the little girl having rushed out to gather a nosegay for Miss Lloyd.

Grace says she is ready, and takes Maggie's hand, feeling her a great stay in that painful moment. She was not insensible to the want of cordial kindness in Miss Miller's leave-taking.

Mr. Miller had gone back to the library to master the agitation Grace had not seen; he sat down, and leaned his head against one of the book cases; he was suffering greatly, but as one does in the first moments of any grief—mechanically rather than consciously.

He hears a little bustle in the hall—he knows what it is—Grace is going away; in

a few minutes the house would be without her gentle presence—how happy she had made it to him; was it her fault if she could not love him? but she should not go thence without all honour from him. He got up, and was in time to hand her into the carriage; some words welled up from her heart to her lips; but it was too late; she leant back in the carriage—she must suffocate if it did not drive on instantly, so thick and fast were sobs rising in her throat.

Maggie sat for some time watching Grace's emotion, and wondering Miss Lloyd should cry just like a baby. At last she said—

“What's the matter with you? Are you crying about your niece, or because you are going home?”

"I am very nervous and foolish, Maggie; but I am going to try and be braver."

"Oh, don't mind for me," said Maggie, "I don't care, you know. These are for you," she added, thrusting some beautiful fresh roses into Grace's hand. "I'll make my aunts bring me very often to see you—shall I?"

"Yes, as often as you like."

A short silence ensued, then Maggie said—

"Miss Lloyd, I have got a secret to tell you—something very strange."

Grace said—"Indeed!" without paying much attention to this exordium.

"Do you know they are going to put you on my poor mamma's tomb?" whispered the child, in an awed manner.

What a rush of recollections came over poor Grace.

"Yes, it is really true, for auntie took me to the man who did it, yesterday when you were all away: it's white marble—so very white; and as soon as I saw it, I cried out—That's our Miss Lloyd. Auntie said—'Nonsense, child, that's Hope—don't you see the Anchor?' But I am sure it is your picture, for the man—such an odd man—said—'Yer a shairp—' yes, he pronounced it so—shairp, not sharp—shairp, lassie; and then he uncovered a head on a shelf—it was yellow, and I said—that's Miss Lloyd, a young lady we know.—The man so like Orson, you know, nodded, quite pleased."

Grace did not dare to hope the shairp lassie's papa would not see the likeness also.

What a strange concatenation of circumstances. When Mr. Veitch was modelling at Violet Bank, could any but a heaven-born prophet have foreseen the present category of her sensations ?

CHAPTER VII.

GRACE sits with little Nelly on her knee, smiling and caressing the pale child, its fair curls hid by the cap of sickness, and the small shoulders wrapped in one of grandmamma's old India shawls.

Miss Koëcher is on a chair facing Grace and the wee thing. Miss Koëcher is trying hard to make herself agreeable to the child,

for good Miss Koëcher, who naturally understands Grace's face very well indeed, gathers from it that her dear ex-pupil is far from inclined to be merry—on the contrary, is endeavouring not to be sad.

Miss Koëcher knows of handsome Captain Oscar Miller, and at once decides how it has been, and how it is, and sighing, utters mentally her usual objurgation—

“*Ach, lieber Gott, so goes it in this world.*”

Miss Koëcher is consequently in a most resolutely cheerful mood, driving back her memory to her own babyhood, and strives—God help her!—at a free translation of one of her nurse's songs.

“Two eyes hab I, bot bright and clear—
Upon my head, two ear;

A mout—a mout hab I
For to eat—for to speak ;
Here a hand, dere a hand ;
Foots hab I, which can stand."

Suiting the action to the word, Miss Koëcher touches the child's hands, feet, and eyes ; Nelly, not comprehending these playful manipulations, begins to whimper. So Miss Koëcher, crest-fallen and mortified, pronounces sentence on herself by saying—

" I will go, and to-night I will come and see de poor dear."

Vick, less demonstrative, nevertheless irritates Grace's nerves horribly by her incessant plaintive "houm! houm!" There was unusual impatience in Grace's feelings, and trifles that formerly—the formerly referring to the time before her visit to Ashburn

—would have been endured with patience or overlooked, now set every nerve aching. This is an excuse offered for Grace being guilty of the wish that all her friends were not single women ; very kind, indeed, but so awfully ignorant of the management of children, they cannot even make a comfortable lap.

However, Nelly is closing her dear eyes, as if sleep were coming to them ; and Grace, in a low, murmuring voice, chants two lines of the lullaby—

“ Hush a by, baby, on a tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock ;”

then she stops and thinks, “ Will he give me quite up ?”

The heavy eyelids rise and remind her of her song. She goes on—

“When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
Down tumbles baby, and cradle, and all.”

She can think again and torment herself quite at her own pleasure, and the dark face, with its look of pain, rises before her, and she does not attempt to banish it—she rather encourages it to remain and torture her. She deserves to suffer, for having wounded him. She does not put in as the least plea for her justification, that of having innocently or involuntarily done the deed; she rather consoles herself by self-condemnation, and is so repentant, but what could she do? If she could only make him understand the real motive of her hesitation; he had taken her at her first word—he was quite right; all she wanted now to console her—no, to make her perfectly happy was, that he should

know it was not exactly from want of esteem and gratitude. Grace thought—a thought that was deep down in her heart, scarcely traceable to herself—that if he knew this grand truth, the look of pain that so haunted her, would vanish.

“Hush a by baby—hush! hush!” and away goes thought plodding wearily over the same ground.

This was how it was with Grace that day; and the next, Miss Miller came as she had promised, saying everything she ought to say as a kind acquaintance. Flora was out riding, but she sent a note, the four sides filled, each line consisting of one or at most two words; the initials A. V. occurring at regular intervals, the whole signed by “your fond Flora.”

The visits were as unsatisfactory as pos-

sible, and left Grace labouring with a greater load on her heart than ever. Miss Miller had never named or even alluded to John Miller, not even as "my brother."

"Did she know? and was she angry?" Grace never remarked that Miss Miller had not spoken of Mrs. Maynard, nor Miss Minnie, nor Captain Oscar.

Grace was very unjust; Miss Miller, in fact, had tried to be kinder than her wont; Miss Miller having come fully persuaded that Miss Lloyd had been sensible enough to refuse a man so much older than herself.

When Miss Miller departed, Grace felt greatly disposed to cry; she had a presentiment that this was the close of her intimacy at Ashburn. What did she want or expect after her own exemplary conduct to the

owner of that dear place, every inch of it dear for his sake.

The following morning Miss de Witt came to see Nelly ostensibly, but covertly to examine Grace—ay, cross-examine her.

“ Hum ! I don’t think Ashburn seems to have agreed with you ; your eyes are a little inflamed, I think—they have a red rim. Take care, Grace, if you get bad eyes, your good looks will be ruined. Fretting about the child ! nonsense ! she must go through her diseases as well as other children. You needn’t tell me you are anxious—I can see that well enough without glasses.” This with one of Miss de Witt’s knowing nods.

Grace winced under the old lady’s look, and having once flushed, her face kept on burning. Miss de Witt’s sagacious eyes were the most flurrying eyes in the world

when one had any secret thoughts; they clearly expressed with a kindly contempt, "I know all about it, child; no use trying to humbug me."

As it happened, Miss de Witt this time was unusually wide of the mark, the natural result of her conviction of the superiority of her godson rendering it impossible "that any one should look at John when Oscar was by."

Before Captain Miller's partial godmamma went away, she whispered to Grace, "What's old Monypenny doing here so much? if that sapless willow there," nodding towards unconscious Vick, "were sure of her legacy, I'd warn you to forbid his visits here. He's growing quite a Lothario, for I heard of his walking home with the German Mamselle instead of Frank,—is it true?"

On the third morning Grace looked sorrowfully from the parlour window, watching the retreating figure of her young brother, and she saw that summer was fast going. The trees in the garden of a mansion of pretension which stood obliquely to the little corner house, shewed her that autumn was already busy with his brush full of golden yellow. Season will succeed season, but she believes that change is over for her. She has shut out the sunbeam that came and wooed her; and if then and there Grace did not hate the sun, and the sight of the world in general, it proves her to have been a sensible, conscientious girl.

While she is still at the window, the widow woman, with her load of barm for those who bake at home, drops her a curtsey, and stops.

During the colloquy that ensues between the barm-seller and Big Susan, the postman, who in general only comes once a month to No. 6, with the Indian letter, joins the two women. He offers Susan a letter, with a deep black border. Susan, disliking its look, shakes her head at it, but is at last persuaded to take it. But she finishes her bargain with the tidy widow-woman before bringing the letter to her young mistress.

Grace — as every one does who cannot recognize a handwriting—first made out the post-mark to be Canterbury, then endeavoured to decipher what was on the seal. After failing to guess who could be her correspondent, she applied herself to the inside of the envelope for information.

An exclamation, very like that of a person receiving a sharp sting, passed her

lips as the signature of old Mrs. Bolton presented itself to her. How cold Grace turned; how instantaneous was the resurrection of the last Christmas Day at Violet Bank and its morrow of dismay!

For an instant she loathed the sight of the paper, though its deep mournful edging was as a voice from the grave calling out for mercy and forgiveness. Not in vain was the appeal, for, "Poor old woman! God help her!" sighed Grace. Common enough expressions—often mere lip service, but not in this instance. No, Grace was weeping over the childless old mother's letter.

It told that Richard Bolton was dead!—quiet, at last, in the cold silent grave, in some rocky gorge, where no church-bell had ever sounded to make man remember there was eternity waiting for him, whether his

days were short or long; far away, that unconsecrated grave, among all sorts of unchristian men—far away from the agonized mother, trying to write those sublime words of faith, "God's will be done."

Such was the end of Richard Bolton's life of agitation—of low desires, of improvident egotism.

Within Mrs. Bolton's letter was an inclosure, addressed to Mrs. or Miss Lloyd, forwarded in conformity to Bolton's last instructions.

This inclosure was a dirty crumpled paper, which, no sooner had Grace unfolded, than she threw it from her, in an uncontrollable panic. It was a cheque, signed at full length—Sylvia Plumbthorne Mansell. On the back was written, in well-remem-

bered characters, Maximus Mansell, the date and every detail, even to the M.D., in full.

Had Grace followed her first impulse, she would have consigned this small gaudy representative of gold at once to the kitchen fire, — and who could have wondered? What good could arise to her from those three names, in such strange conjunction — the names of the three persons through whose active or passive instrumentality she had known such suffering?

When Grace gave Frank the letter in the evening, she said —

“I wrote at once to the poor old lady.”

“That is right. And do you know, I am glad the fellow was not such an out and out rogue? not for the value of this money, so

much as because, hearing of such constant villany as one does, is enough to make one think there's no such thing as goodness or honesty left in the world."

"I am very thankful for the poor mother's sake. She begs me to tell everybody, that they may see he was unfortunate, and not really dishonest. She dwells so on the comfort his thinking of paying us, is to her. Poor old lady!"

"There is this good in this nasty bit of paper—I shall be easy about you all, and I shan't have to begin with asking advances from old Hitzig. Strange that a reimbursement should come in this shape," pointing to the signatures. Frankie went on. "There are some people one never can get rid of, all one's life, it would seem. I suppose it's right and tight"—handling the

cheque—"though the date is rather far back. Queer its having been to California. Whoever got it first, hasn't been able to get it cashed,—I see that plain enough."

"How?" asked Grace.

"It's a crossed cheque. Do you see those two lines, with Miller's name between? That makes it only payable at Miller's Bank. That is one of the dodges to detect a forgery."

"Did you ever see a forgery, Frank?"

"No, never, and I hope never will, dear."

Grace gave a glance at the greasy paper in her young brother's hand, saying, with an air of disgust—

"Put that horrid thing away, dear boy. Do what is necessary about it, but don't let

us talk any more about it. There is something no canny in its look, as Susan would say. Come and have your singing lesson; you won't enjoy that great advantage long."

The little attempt at a joke was a sad failure.

The time fixed for Frankie's departure was drawing frightfully near. He had not a week to remain, and the hearts of brother and sister were very heavy. They had never been separated in their lives before Grace went to Ashburn.

There was no singing lesson that evening; the brother and sister were settling many things about the future—how often they were to write, and how, if the least thing was the matter, they were neither of them to mind expense, but to telegraph at once.

"We can each of us afford it now," said Frankie, "and I'll run over at Christmas, Grace."

There was a quavery sound in Frank's strong voice, and Grace's sweet face looked pale and pinched as they talked thus.

"You know, dear Grace," said Frankie, as they were bidding each other good night, "that it isn't that I want to leave home. I care for nothing so much as you, dear Grace. If I could only have you with me, I shouldn't care about any thing else. But I must work, Grace;" and the young man laid his head on her shoulder, and she felt his hot tears on her neck.

"Dear Frankie, dear Frankie," was what

Grace said in return ; and there was a sensation like remorse of conscience in her caress, for she could not have said *he* was still all the world to her.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WELL, how would you like to take it?" asked Mr. Blunt, the cashier of two generations of Millers, as he received a cheque for eight hundred pounds from Frank Lloyd the following morning, which happened to be a Saturday.

"I don't want money," answered Frank ;
"I wish to enter a credit here for my sister,

because as I am going away, I think you will be so kind, Mr. Blunt, as to help her a little with her money matters. She is not accustomed to the sort of thing, and will be sure to make blunders, and frighten herself to death."

"Exactly so," replied Mr. Blunt, who, by the way, had always greatly patronized the youth; and having even once spent a Saturday evening at No. 6, Pine Row, had come away, impressed with the fact of Miss Grace Lloyd being about as handsome as girls used to be in his youth.

The way in which cashiers look at a cheque, and then glance at you over their spectacles, if you happen to be a stranger, is an alarming process to the sensitive uninitiated, but Frank never thought of watching the proceedings of old Blunt.

That personage retired behind his cage-like desk, and spreading out the dirty piece of paper, began, not without as much disgust as any reasonable being can feel for what represented so much good money, smoothing out the crumples and dogs' ears, so foreign to his ideas of what a respectable cheque ought to be.

Frankie, busy in his own place (it was his last day there, and he wished to leave a good character behind him for punctuality and order), never therefore remarked how Mr. Blunt kept on handling the paper, peering at it, laying it down, and then almost stealthily taking it up again. Nor did Frank notice now immediately after the arrival of Mr. Miller, Mr. Blunt requested the honour of a private audience.

"Sit down, Mr. Blunt; what is the matter?"

"A cheque, sir, for a largeish amount, drawn by Mrs. Mansell," was the answer.

"Ha! and no effects?"

"Yes, sir, that's not what I mean, but I don't know what to make of it," twisting the greasy paper in his hand; "it has a queerish look—I don't like this yellowishness about these eights. See here, sir, written eight, and figure eight yellowish," pointing out the difference in the colour of the ink between them and the rest of the writing on the cheque.

"Hum!" said Mr. Miller; "who presented it?"

"Young Lloyd; but, sir, we can't go for to suspect him, nor the young lady who has written her name here."

"She needn't have done that," said Mr. Miller, quite snappishly ; "send Mr. Lloyd to me."

"If I might take upon me to advise, sir," said the cashier, "you will not call in Mr. Lloyd ; the other clerks will smell a rat, sir, and may make a baddish story out of it, and the lad, as one may say, just getting a lift in the world. Stories are terribly stickyish things, sir."

"Then what do you advise, Mr. Blunt ?"

"Mrs. Mansell's carriage is in town, sir ; it passed five minutes before you came in. It's Saturday, sir, and all the ladies are in town shopping."

It was the custom for the ladies in the neighbourhood of Twiston to shop early on Saturday, and for their husbands—those, at least, who had warehouses or offices in the

town—to drive home with their wives on that half-holiday.”

“Very well, Mr. Blunt, send some one, then, to ask Mrs. Mansell to call here before going out of town.”

* * * * *

After the grand christening, Dr. Mansell detected his first grey hair. After that day it was that his glance grew furtive, his step heavy; that when called to a stranger he would change colour and ask so many questions, that his wife said to him one day—

“It’s enough to make any one fancy you are afraid of meeting some particular person.”

He was silent in future before her, but only before her; no lapse of time made him

neglect this precaution. Once, when sent for in a great hurry to Miller's bank, he had almost refused to go,—in fact, only taking his hat when the servant added,—

“The messenger begs you to make haste, as the head clerk is in a fit.”

After the fine christening, Dr. Mansell's interest in ship news became intense; he studied the columns that related the sad casualties at sea, with the trembling eagerness of one whose greatest venture of happiness is on the fickle, stormy ocean. Alas! there was a thought hid from human eye, a thought living in his heart night and day, a thought that fathered a most wicked wish. The past, the unrelenting, irretrievable past, could it only be buried in the Atlantic full forty fathom deep, out of reach of diving-bell

or submarine telegraph? Try to shirk it as he would, it lived in the deep sigh breathed in his splendidly appointed equipage that whirled the dust up to the little corner house windows on the second storey; it lived in the uneasy jerk with which he strove to press it down, heaping over it folio and quarto of scientific lore; it lived and poisoned every hope, blunted every aspiration, marred, even his newly-awakened father's joy.

After the gay christening, Sylvia found her husband daily more reserved—daily graver—speaking less and less.

Whether she gave way to bursts of anguish as unrestrained as apparently unreasonable, or lived the life of a recluse, a prey to the deepest melancholy—whether her mood displayed the petulance of a panther, or

the melting softness of the turtle-dove, his indifference remained equally stony.

Many a night had Sylvia banished sleep from her eyes, and strained her ears to catch the words hoarsely babbled by her husband in sleep. She irritated him by questions, alarmed him by her watchfulness, but never found the smallest peg on which to hang any of her hundred and one suspicions.

This state of things lasted some months, each day bringing husband and wife nearer to a critical moment in their lives.

Sylvia's feelings, indeed, had undergone a change much more serious than she was yet aware of.

At the time of her marriage she had been overflowing with sensibility and many good and loving impulses; she had been

in the first blossoming of her happiness—full of generous sincerity ; but as happiness and trust faded, so withered the good seed in the thin soil of her nature ; and one day she acknowledged to herself that the man it had been her triumph and joy to win, was, after all, no better than other men.

The rose-coloured glasses had been replaced by strong microscopes ; the dreary confession was forgotten almost as soon as made ; but it occurred again, and then again—it was becoming a daily exercise. She had lost, long ago, the implicit faith of love in him, but, oh ! misery of miseries, she was on the eve of scepticism as to her own feelings.

Her restless soul, her exaggerated sensibility, required a loving shelter in some

firm heart ; had she found these, her course might not only have been harmless, but bright.

Poor Sylvia !

It had been a dangerous experiment that of seeking the companionship of "dear Oscar." The first motive had certainly been very soon forgotten—not that Sylvia really cared more for her early playmate than she did for his brother John ; but she had got accustomed to his long-lounging visits—to the excitement of the music and the readings, until his society had become a daily want. When he left off coming regularly, she felt a void and a loneliness rather dangerous.

She often tried to get up some of her former anxiety for Dr. Mansell's society ; it would not do.

"Why can't I?" was a question she did not put actually into words, but it was one that so haunted her, that it brought her to study his character far too closely for any good result. As much as she had before exalted Dr. Mansell, was she now inclined to lower him.

Renouncing, as something as unsubstantial as a dream, all those hopes of a happy married life, Sylvia now, during one-half of her time, gave way to sentimental reverie about her unhappy fate,—the other half being spent in seeking every available dissipation.

* * * *

It was at this epoch that events curiously tightened the thread that had all

along entangled and connected the lives of Grace and Sylvia.

It had so happened that Mr. Partridge, the Deepdene practitioner, by living close to the corner house, was summoned when Mrs. Lloyd had her paralytic seizure, and had thus become also the Lloyds' medical man. Mr. Partridge was, therefore, of course, fetched by Big Susan when poor little Nelly was taken ill with croup.

Now Mr. Partridge, in gratitude for favours from Deepdene, patronized the husband of Sylvia Birch, and always sent for him as consulting physician on all possible occasions. He did so in the present instance, either ignorant or oblivious of Dr. Mansell's formerly standing in the position of Miss Lloyd's betrothed husband. Little did he dream of the storm

and mischief his officiousness would cause.

However Mr. Partridge might be ignorant of or indifferent to Dr. Mansell's former connection with the Lloyd family, Miss Vick was far from forgetting it, and even felt herself called on to show her remembrance of the fact by some mark of displeasure—she would have felt herself a Judas to receive him with politeness.

Poor Vick, sufficiently confused by such a sudden call on her energies as a sick child to nurse, was nearly fainting when forced into communication with Grace's recreant lover. What with her indignation against him, her terrors about Nelly, and her fear lest Grace should arrive and find Dr. Mansell in her home, and apparently brought there by Vick herself, her account

of Nelly's symptoms was almost unintelligible to the physician. He overheard her loud mutterings to Susan however, and found no difficulty in understanding one cause of her extreme trepidation.

"Oh, dear Susan!" was the sharp whisper; "only think—what shall I do if Miss Grace comes back with Mr. Frank."

Dr. Mansell was as anxious to avoid Grace as Miss Vick could desire. He had known from Mr. Partridge that Miss Lloyd was absent, or he would not have ventured to the corner house—not from fear of Grace, but from fear of Sylvia.

Dr. Mansell relieved Miss Vick's mind by taking his leave, telling Big Susan, however, that he should call again late that night to inquire for the child, but that he did not anticipate any danger.

Grace, forewarned, could keep out of his way; and he was sure she would do so,—he judged from his own feelings.

It was in this second visit that Dr. Mansell was accosted by John Miller, waiting in the carriage, while his sister visited the child and encouraged Miss Vick.

The very day after Grace's return to her own home, a most unexpected piece of good fortune befel Dr. Mansell. One of the speculations in which he had invested pretty largely, and one which had begun to be considered a dangerous experiment, blossomed out into more than a fair promise. Most substantial returns were announced.

In the gayest of moods Dr. Mansell hastened home, anxious, once in a way, for sympathy. He opened the hall door with

his latch key, and it was like a boy that he ran up to the drawing-room. It was vacant; so much the better; he should be sure of Sylvia to himself without interruption. He hurried up another flight of stairs, and after a hasty knock at his wife's dressing-room door, he entered.

Mrs. Mansell was seated at her toilet-table, having her hair dressed for dinner.

"It is Dr. Mansell, mem," said the lady's maid.

Up rose the lady, with all her really splendid light hair hanging round her like a fleece of gold.

The husband was about to say, "Send your maid away," when the well-known fierce glance of her eye arrested the words on his lips. He had always shrunk from

Sylvia when she wore that fearful face—when the blue of the eye, paled almost to white, and the powerful jaw advanced; there was something so animal in the look.

The past!—oh! that unrelenting, irretrievable past! What had it given up, to make this woman he was seeking as a sharer of his joy, repel him like a rock-bound coast.

Mrs. Mansell had received a morning visitor, who, among other gossip, said—

“Have you heard how poor Mrs. Lloyd’s grandchild is to-day? I was told it had been dangerously ill.”

Mrs. Mansell had no acquaintance with Mrs. Lloyd. This was affirmed in her coldest voice. “What in the world could have tempted the woman to suppose *she*

knew anything about the Lloyds, of all people in the world?"

"I thought you might be able to tell me," continued the agreeable visitor, "as old Partridge said to me this morning that Dr. Mansell had been called in."

"Indeed!"

Mrs. Mansell was not aware of it. "Dr. Mansell never entertained her with the ailments of his patients,"—not true, exactly, but that did not signify.

"Of course not, generally speaking," persisted the acquaintance, as a person does, who, committing one blunder, goes on to another; "but there is something so romantic in this case—old lovers meeting again."

Mrs. Mansell bore the blow heroically. She smiled, not very agreeably, but she

did smile, and very like it made her to her mother. This smile was on her mouth when her well-informed friend departed.

Then she made a spring to the desk, in which lay Dr. Mansell's day-book. No, not a mention of a single visit to the Lloyds. That odious woman had not mentioned if the child had been long ill; but no doubt he had been in attendance for Heaven knows how long. Ah! that explained his absent manner—more absent than ever lately.

What a Vesuvius her breast became! how the lava of jealousy boiled and bubbled! how muttered curses, like red-hot stones, rose, and falling down again, inflicted fresh wounds on herself, poor soul! If he were only there! Never, even in

the days when his presence or his absence made sunshine or shade for her, had she so longed for the sound of his footsteps.

The dressing-bell rung, and she mechanically obeyed the summons—mechanically she submitted herself to the usual routine of toilet duties, but in brooding silence.

Her husband was before Sylvia now; they were face to face, but her utterance was locked up by the magnitude of her passion.

At last, in a low tone, she asked,

“How is Mrs. Lloyd’s grandchild?”

Dr. Mansell started, but quickly rallied, and answered,

“I am glad to say better, out of danger;” then, like a wise man, he turned to fly from the storm.

"Stay, sir!" cried Mrs. Mansell, in a voice so thrilling that her husband involuntarily obeyed.

"If you have anything to say to me, Sylvia, you had better dismiss your maid."

"No, I shall not; I don't care if all the world heard me. I have nothing to conceal."

"My duty is to attend wherever I am sent for."

"Duty—duty—that word makes me sick, excuse, as it is for every meanness, every cunning."

"Your silly feelings hoodwink your judgment, Sylvia," said Dr. Mansell, trying to appear composed, adding, in a lower tone, "don't, for Heaven's sake, make a fool of yourself before your servant!"

“Hood-winked!” she laughed; “you are mistaken, my silly feelings make me, on the contrary, very clear-sighted—they make me understand why these duty visits to Mrs. Lloyd’s house, are not marked down, the poor wife must be kept ignorant of her husband’s sentimental friendship and generosity.”

“Generosity! stuff and nonsense, I have been paid my two fees—Come, let’s be done once for all with these flights of imagination. You conjure up a chimera for the mere pleasure of laying it low again.”

“A chimera? a grand word Dr. Mansell, for a mean truth,” said Sylvia; “pray may I ask you, why you didn’t mark down these duty visits?”

“So you have been hunting in my desk

again. Why did I not mark them down? I forgot them, or had not time, I suppose."

"You forgot them you *suppose*," she repeated, with withering scorn,—“You liar,” and she seized his hand with a gripe, that made him wince.

“You are not going to strike me, are you?” he asked with a smile.

“You can laugh when you see me in agony,—laugh away, I deserve it for having been such a fool as to have anything to do with you. I am tired of it all—I am—I *have* tried to make you love me—do you think I didn't know from the first that you only cared for my money? do you think I ever believed you loved me? though you swore it—but I loved you, and like an idiot, I thought my love would make you

love me—as if money could buy love. Don't touch me, don't," she continued, speaking more and more rapidly. "I hate you, I do, I'll do you all the harm I can, I'll be a watch and a spy on you—I won't shut my eyes any more—what came of the cheque I gave you—you thought I had forgotten it—given to a friend,"—and she laughed aloud, a long laugh, a laugh that did one harm only to hear it,—“I'll tell you what, Max,” putting her face as high towards his as she could, “I know you now, you are a liar—I shouldn't wonder at all if you turned out a thief—why, you'll do anything for money—didn't you sell yourself—first to Miss Lloyd—and then to me?—yes—yes—yes—sold yourself.”

“You are mad with passion, Sylvia,

and do not know what you are saying, before another hour is over, you'll repent every word you have just said."

"Shall I? I'll say it, every syllable over again, if you like—you look at Taylor—whatever you do, Taylor, don't sell yourself, my good girl, it's never honest."

Dr. Mansell turned to seek his dressing-room, half blinded by shame and rage; the alarmed lady's maid opened the door for him; as he passed through, a deep sob, a man's sob, smote on the ear of his infuriated wife.

The sound startled Sylvia. She stood shocked and self-abased, her passion checked at its greatest height, suddenly, violently, as molten metal by a dash of cold water. She stood still on the spot where her husband had left her, ashamed now—perhaps fright-

ened ; but she had no wild impulses now prompting her to rush after the offended man, to throw herself into his arms, and sob out repentance on his bosom, to cast herself at his feet, and clinging to his knees, as she had done more than once, beg and pray for forgiveness.

Old speeches of his, on those occasions, stony throwing-back, rough speeches, ironical rebuffs, nonchalant humiliations, when there ought to have been tender chiding, or manly guidance, had he had any true-heartedness in him. These had prepared her heart to be fire and water-proof against his present emotion.

The wife stood appalled before her toilet-table, appalled, not by the secret consciousness of wrong doing, but by the

dreadful discovery of the state of her affections.

She knew now that her husband had lost those affections.

The husband remained alone in his humiliation, hating her for not doing now, what he had so often ridiculed or railed at her for doing in former days.

Sylvia's last words had awoke the somewhat numbed recollection of the ugly little episode of the dapper man and the cheque, and with that recollection came a long train of suspicions and disagreeable anticipations.

One thing, he is thankful for. He even says, "Thank God for it," but that is a mere conventional, no-meaning expression on Dr. Mansell's lips.

“Thank God! I did not put myself in her power. Tigress! in one of her furies she would put the rope herself round my neck.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE scene recorded in the last chapter took place on the Friday. It was the morning of the following day, Saturday, that, in compliance with the request conveyed by Mr. Miller's messenger, Sylvia, most voluminously fashionable, swept through the outer room of the bank, into Mr. Miller's private room, and occupied the

chair tenanted half an hour previously by the anxious Mr. Blunt. There never were or will be more than two seats in that sunless, cheerless place.

"It's a long time since I was here," said Sylvia—"not since I was married. Every thing looks just the same, even that hole in the carpet—not a bit bigger."

Mr. Miller, unlike Oscar, was not at all given to a tone of sentiment in conversation; so, passing over the speech, he said, in his usual matter-of-fact manner.

"A cheque of yours has been presented this morning, and I am desirous you should see it before it be paid."

"A cheque of mine?" I have not drawn a cheque this month past."

"This is a very old one. Just look at

it, will you? I think you may have forgotten it."

The instant Sylvia's eye caught the amount, she exclaimed,

"That! I never gave an order for such a sum. Why, I must have been mad to have done so. It's nearly my whole income!"

"Very true; but still, I could swear to that being your signature, and even to this being Dr. Mansell's. The 'Sylvia' I cannot be mistaken in."

Mrs. Mansell re-examined the cheque, reading the names on it aloud.

"Yes, that is my writing, and that is *his*; but I will take my oath I never did draw such a cheque. I should like to know how this person"—pointing to Grace's name—"came by it."

Mr. Miller looked as he felt, extremely uncomfortable.

"It is so long ago," he remarked, "you may have forgotten the sum."

"Not if it were ten years ago, instead of barely one. I remember all about it, just as if it were yesterday. This is the very cheque for two hundred pounds I gave Dr. Mansell on the day of the christening. He said it was to help an old friend in distress. You needn't look at me that way, Mr. Miller; I can prove what I say. I have kept every one of my cheque-books since I married. The date is one I am not likely to have forgotten."

"Mr. Lloyd," called out the perplexed banker.

As the handsome young man obeyed the summons, Mrs. Mansell fixed her

eyes on him with a most deliberate stare.

"How did this cheque reach you?"

"It came in a letter from Mrs. Bolton to my sister yesterday morning, sir."

"Do you know if Miss Lloyd has kept Mrs. Bolton's letter?"

"I believe so, sir."

"That will do. No—stop; tell Mr. Blunt to step this way, if he is disengaged."

Frank was scarcely out of the room before Mrs. Mansell asked abruptly—

"Is that young man a son of the Mrs. Lloyd who once lived at Violet Bank?"

"Yes."

"Is he like his sister?"

"Yes—No, I don't know," returned Mr. Miller, dashing his hands into his hair; "are you really quite sure now, you never gave a

cheque for this amount to Dr. Mansell?
You may easily confuse dates."

"Never, never, I tell you."

"It's very odd," soliloquised the banker.

The grey-haired cashier now made his appearance.

"I believe you said there were effects to Mrs. Mansell's credit sufficient to take up this cheque?"

"Quite so, sir."

"How can that be," said Mrs. Mansell, angrily, "when I have been having money as usual?"

"Dr. Mansell paid in a thousand pounds to your credit some time ago," replied Mr. Blunt.

"Ah!" said Mr. Miller, "when—can you remember, Mr. Blunt?"

"Yes, sir; I looked up the date just

now—as far back, sir, as the July of **last** year.”

“Immediately after the date of **this** cheque, then, it’s all right,” observed Mr. Miller; “thank you.”

Mr. Blunt had almost closed the glass door of communication between the private and public room, when the banker called after him, in a sharp, imperative tone,

“Pay Mr. Lloyd the sum of eight hundred pounds, Mr. Blunt.”

“It’s as clear as possible,” said Mr. Miller, turning to Mrs. Mansell, silenced for an instant by her unbounded astonishment; “Dr. Mansell has expected this demand, and has taken the precaution to meet it so as not to inconvenience you. I told you, you had forgotten it.”

“And you really think you are going to

put me off in that way!" said Sylvia; "no, no, Mr. Miller, I am not quite so silly as you think. You will find it very difficult, do what you will, to screen this Miss Lloyd."

"Why? Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Miller, roused to sit upright, "you don't mean to say you suspect Miss Lloyd of a forgery?" And he burst out laughing.

Sylvia's eyes met those of Mr. Miller with a sort of shock, and that cold, blank stare made him grave instantly.

"And why not?" continued Sylvia, as Mr. Miller remained silent; "her character seems doubtful enough in other respects."

"Doubtful," repeated Mr. Miller, in a satirical tone and with raised eyebrows; "ridiculous nonsense."

"Yes, doubtful, very doubtful," flashed out Sylvia; "what do you call encouraging

the visits of a married man, a former lover ? —and here's a pretty proof of intimacy," pointing to the cheque.

"Midsummer madness !" ejaculated Mr. Miller, adding so sternly, that Sylvia was cowed into listening ; "Mrs. Mansell, this passes permission, even for a woman's tongue. We have known each other all our lives, so I shall take the liberty of telling you that your ungovernable feelings are misleading you."

"It's your feelings that are misleading you, John Miller. What a thing it is to have a pretty face, for she is pretty, isn't she ?"

"Lovely," was the concise reply.

Sylvia half smiled.

"If this Miss What's-her-name were an ugly old woman, you wouldn't be so keen on her behalf."

“Pooh! pooh! the cheque is all right, I tell you, ask Dr. Mansell. It has merely passed through Miss Lloyd’s hands. Can’t you see, that if your detestable suspicions were true, Dr. Mansell wouldn’t need to give a cheque; why couldn’t he have given the money, without running the risk of awkward questions. It’s all right, I tell you,—ask Dr. Mansell.”

“I shall do as I please about that; and as he is a party concerned, I shall *not* ask Dr. Mansell: he would begin bullying me out of my senses again. Since you don’t choose to take up the matter and see me righted”

“Righted! in what way are you wronged, pray? A cheque of yours, endorsed by your husband, comes in; he has provided the money, that’s his business; what upon

earth have you to do with it, or how are you injured?"

Sylvia thought for a little, then she looked Mr. Miller steadily in the face, saying—

"You can't stop my tongue, and I'll talk so that I'll force you to prosecute, if, as you would say, only to clear this lovely *poor orphan*."

This last threat did make an impression on Mr. Miller; it was his turn to reflect.

"Well, let us halve the difference," he said; "give me till Monday morning to make my inquiries, and promise to say nothing about it in the meantime."

"No, no, indeed,—just to let you get that Miss Thing out of the way."

"Upon my sacred word of honour, no; I am to the full as anxious as you can be to have Miss Lloyd's share in this trans-

action made clear to you. Come, for the sake of old times, don't refuse my petition."

"Answer me one question, John Miller,—do you really believe this girl quite free of all blame?"

"I would trust her as myself."

"Hum!—Well, men are blind and partial creatures sometimes. For the sake of your faith—I ought to say credulity in a woman—I'll graciously grant your request. You'll find, as I have done, that 'the world is hollow, and *ybur* doll full of sawdust.'"

"I don't allow the truth of what you say; but I thank you for yielding."

"Add 'so far,'" said Sylvia; "but they have had their day, now I'll have mine: it is a forgery, and you know it as well as I do. Say it isn't if you can. You don't

answer: perhaps you think because I am a silly woman, I don't see the difference of this ink and that," pointing to the slight discolouration on the cheque; " 'damned spots that will not out;' I said that as well as Miss Glyn, didn't I?"

Suspecting what he did suspect, Mr. Miller felt his blood freeze as Sylvia went on in this strain.

"I neither deny nor affirm," he said; "I reserve my opinion, but I would entreat of you not to be rash. You remember your promise to mention this subject to *no one* till Monday after seeing me."

"I won't gossip; I am tolerably honest as the world goes."

Sylvia's excitement was abating as usual from exhausted strength.

"I don't mean gossip," began Mr. Miller;

hesitated, then almost in a whisper he went on: "I want you to promise not to speak on the subject even to Dr. Mansell—not to give any hints."

"Is that all? I can easily promise that, for I assure you, our intercourse has become beautifully small and less by degrees. We are like all married people, I suppose, happier asunder. Don't look so pityingly at me, John Miller; I am indifferently well satisfied with my lot, whatever you may think."

Pen and ink can write down the words, but the bitter sneering of the tone and the listless attitude of the whole figure, the mingling of regret and shame in the expression of the face are indescribable.

When she went away, John Miller felt the atmosphere round him grow easier to breathe.

“Poor thing! poor thing!” came twice or thrice from his lips, as he sat on for some minutes in deep thought. Then carefully placing the cheque in his pocket-book, he rose, buttoned up his coat, drew over it a light paletôt, buttoned that, put on his hat, his gloves, and by that time appearing clearly to have made up his mind, he walked through the same door by which Mrs. Mansell had so lately made her exit, and with his long, lounging step, took his way to Pine Row.

CHAPTER X.

How very little any one person knows of another! Had you met Mr. Miller on his walk to Pine Row, and asked one of his acquaintances what manner of man he might be, the answer of ninety-nine out of a hundred would have been—

“A strictly moral, cold, proud, money-making machine.”

And if any of those ninety-nine respondents had guessed the warmth of his noble heart, the devotion and chivalrous feeling then animating him, they would have probably ridiculed him, and thought him very unfit to be trusted as a banker.

And probably also, Mr. Miller, notwithstanding his fine intellect, would have shrunk from the inane ridicule of the most inane of his acquaintances. Men are all cowards for ridicule.

Yet never had armed knight in knight-hood's palmiest days been more resolved to defend his lady-love in "listed field," and proclaim her, against all antagonists, a pearl of beauty and purity, than John Miller, the Twiston banker.

He had been very wretched since Grace's sudden departure from Ashburn, very de-

sponding and inert for the first twenty-four hours, oppressed by a fear like a nightmare, that he had been mistaken as to Grace's feelings, and that, in truth, she felt nothing but kindly indifference towards him : his conscience made him add the qualification of kindly to indifference.

After having reiterated—"had she loved me, would she have left me without a sign? — the most modest of women can always manage that if they like;" after having accused her of an incapability of understanding a man's strong love because unaccompanied by boyish demonstrations, he began, at the end of six and thirty hours, to desire excessively to bask once more in the light of those wonderful eyes, and to tell her that since she left Ashburn, all his sunshine had departed, and that in

fact he could not be happy without her.

He had whistled the air of one of Grace's songs to old Whisky this Saturday morning, informing the respectable quadruped that he saw "her in the dewy flowers, and heard her in the tunefu' birds,—that not a bonnie flower that springs, by fountain, shaw, or green, and not a bonnie bird that sings but minds him o' his Grace."

And then Mr. Miller had set about reflecting how early he might leave the Bank, how early he might present himself in Pine Row, little dreaming what an extraordinary pretext, the most extraordinary ever furnished to a lover, Mrs. Mansell was about to afford him.

He would speak out for himself first—there should be no mingling of gratitude—

odious word—in her answer. He must win her to give him the right to protect her, before he would tell her she needed a strong arm and a stout heart.

Grace had got up that day with the same feeling of anxious waiting that had weighed upon her since her return home from Ashburn. Each night, indeed, she had gone to bed believing that she had nothing more to expect from life, and each morning had risen with the anticipation of “something” occurring. The one feeling lasted from breakfast till five o’clock, and then surrendered to the other.

On this Saturday in question Grace felt more sure than ever that the said “something” would happen.

The so-called magnetic sympathies, what are they, after all, but identity of senti-

ments?—and what less mysterious and more natural than that two people suffering from one and the same cause, in one and the same manner, should have, though separated, similar thoughts and sensations?

Whether this be an explanation or not of the apparent phenomenon, the fact is undoubted that Grace was expecting Mr. Miller that forenoon, as if she had received a notification from himself, and was naturally too absent in mind to notice Miss Vick's extreme restlessness.

Every time the gate bell rang, without any regard for the fine sock she was knitting for Nelly, Vick went to the window, returning to her seat with a heavy sigh of disappointment, and discovering half-a dozen stitches dropped off No. 25 needles.

Unable to bear the gloom of her own despairing thoughts any longer, Vick startled Grace out of her reverie by exclaiming—

“I suppose ~~we~~ *shall* see some one to-day?”

“Who?” asked Grace, not yet quite present in mind.

“Miss Cocker,”—Vick’s method of pronouncing Koëcher—“or Miss de Witt; it’s been quite dull for you, dear, since you came home.”

“Now you mention it,” answered Grace, “certainly I am astonished Mr. Monypenny has not been here to call; it’s more than a month since I saw him—it was before I went to Ashburn.”—That was the new era from which Grace dated.

“He came very often while you were

away ; I dare say he thinks I don't want company now you are at home." And Vick sighed.

" We must give him a scolding the first time he comes," said Grace, a little diverted.

A pause—then Miss Vick said, in what was a very studied way for her—

" Do you think widows shouldn't marry, dear?"

" Widows!" exclaimed Grace ; " I never thought — I never considered the subject."

" Oh !"—another short silence.

" Not exactly widows, you know, but those who might in the course of nature have been widows, which certainly is not perfectly the same thing—but—a—oh, there's that bell again!"—and Vick bustled

to the window—"it's a tall, black-looking, thin man;" in a tone of inquiry, "What can he be wanting here, I wonder?"

Ah! how the description colours Grace's pale cheeks, how the blush deepens as she hears Big Susan's step on the stair, how she listens for another sound; will he come there before them all—will he shake hands with her?

Susan, at Mr. Miller's request, had allowed him to wait in the dining-room, while she took up his card to Miss Lloyd, with a request that he might see her down stairs.

"What's in the wind now?" muttered Susan, after measuring Mr. Miller from head to foot.

"Miss Lloyd," called out Susan, at the drawing-room door, without coming in,

"yer wanted below on partikler business, here's the man's card."

There was nothing for it but to go down ; though, now he was really there, Grace would have given a good deal to escape, or, at any rate, delay the meeting.

Mr. Miller heard her light step, and met her in the passage, took her hand, led her into the dining-room, and shut the door.

She was very pale, nor did she venture to raise her eyes.

They stood a minute or more in complete silence, before John Miller said,

" You are not displeased at my coming, are you ?"

" Oh ! no, indeed," in a low voice, but fervently.

" Will you be displeased if I ask you to be

very candid with me, very explicit, Grace?" He went on losing his calm manner, and giving Grace courage by the way the hand that held her's trembled. "You know, yes, you know that I love you, Grace, my heart aches with the fulness of my love, you are to me all that is lovely and loveable on earth. But I will not tell you what I feel, lest you should not have courage to tell me that your young life cannot mingle with my coming age."

Here Grace finds courage, desperate enough to give the tiniest of pressures to the hand clasping her's, and to say in a whisper, so low, it was a wonder it reached him,

"It is not that indeed."

"What is it then, my darling?" with a sudden burst of the pent up feeling, and

taking fuller possession of her hand by enclosing it between both his own. "What is it, my darling?"

She was a brave, truthful girl now, she had seen, and been heart-struck by the languor and paleness of his countenance, she would speak out.

"Perhaps you never heard that—that—you don't know that I was once"—she burst into tears.

"Engaged to a fool," said Mr. Miller, finishing the sentence for her. "My poor darling, my little dove, is that the dreadful mystery? yes; I know that Grace, know all about my quiet, gentle Grace; know that she was once an unsuspicious, inexperienced child, and a rash child, and that therefore she has a want of faith, even in fond true hearts. Look up, Grace, and let me read your

dear honest eyes, let me see if I may call you my Grace, my own, very own Grace."

She could not look up; but she bent down, and pressed her forehead on his hand with sweet loving humility.

"My blessing! my blessing!" he murmured. "Grace, hear my confession now. I have been an egotist, and a Pharisee; thinking myself better than others, because I lived the life of a selfish recluse."

"You!! who are so good and kind to every one," said Grace. Love had exalted him in her eyes, to all that is beautiful and glorious.

"Oh! Grace, my darling, what should I not have missed had I only met you in the world, without the opportunity of knowing you. How graciously God has dealt with

my cold heart. Love for you has given me a glimpse of how God loves us all. He bestows blessings on us, not because we love Him, but because He loves us. I never understood those words before. Henceforth John Miller will strive to show that God's spirit of love dwells in him."

Grace looked up at him as he spoke these serious words ; she felt them a guarantee of a love that would last beyond this life.

How she revered him ! how confidently her heart lifted itself up to his, to cling there for evermore, and John Miller read all this in the clear depths of her wonderful eyes.

"My blessing ! my blessing !" was all he could say.

The newly-betrothed went up-stairs, and Grace, with a betraying blush, said—

"Mamma, this is Mr. Miller, Frankie's friend."

The unfortunate lady tried to rise from her chair, to welcome him, but he, tenderly re-seating her, spoke to her so respectfully and kindly, that Grace was very nearly in tears at the doubt that rose in her mind whether she were worthy of him.

"This is Miss Vick, I am sure," he said to the low-spirited spinster; "I hope we shall soon see you at Ashburn, Miss Vick; you must come and criticise our flowers; I hear you are quite a connoisseur, and I like my garden to be admired by good judges."

Poor Vick was conquered, but she answered in a dignified and constrained manner. It would be a sort of infidelity

to Mr. Monypenny to be pleased with any one else. Vick had very rigid ideas on the score of coquetry.

"Now, little woman," said Mr. Miller to Nelly, whom he had been tossing higher than his head, "you and I must be good. I must talk to your aunt—don't you see she thinks us both very naughty?"

The little creature was quiet at once, nestling her head against him.

With a face suddenly overcast, Mr. Miller said—

"I am obliged to talk to you on a disagreeable subject, and to ask you some disagreeable questions. You must remember, however, that our interests are one and indivisible now."

He spoke in so low a voice that Vick thought she had better leave them free to

discuss whatever business had brought the Twiston banker to Pine Row.

As soon as Miss Vick had left the room, Mr. Miller, repossessing himself of one of Grace's hands, said—

"You have had some correspondence lately with a person named Bolton, have you not?"

"Mrs. Bolton," answered Grace, "wrote to tell me of her son's death, and to send me an order for some money he left me as part payment of a large debt."

"What was the amount of the cheque? Can you remember exactly?"

"Oh, yes; it was for eight hundred pounds."

"You are quite sure you *saw* that the cheque was for eight hundred pounds?—No one told you so—you *saw* it?"

"I am quite sure, for I was alone when I received the letter, and I had a great inclination to put the dirty piece of paper in the fire, only I thought I should be wronging mamma and Frankie; besides," said Grace, as if she were going to give an unanswerable proof, "Frankie took the order to your own bank, so you can easily find out."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Miller; "have you any objection to let me see Mrs. Bolton's letter?"

"Oh, no! only it seems wrong to show what was written in the belief that I alone should see it.",

"But it cannot be helped, dearest girl, or I would not begin so soon to use my authority." His smile did not disguise his uneasiness. "You must allow me to read the letter, Grace."

She made no further objection, but fetched it at once ; there was, however, a growing trepidation in her manner, that went to John Miller's heart.

" Very unfortunate, very unfortunate," he muttered.

" What is unfortunate ?" asked Grace ;
" oh, don't let my showing you her letter bring more trouble on poor Mrs. Bolton."

" Try and be calm, Grace ; remember that I am here, with the right and power to protect you."

Grace stole her hand back into his.

" That's right," he exclaimed, with a flash of joy from his great eyes ; " Mrs. Sylvia Plumthorne Mansell," and his long finger followed her name as he spoke, " protests that this cheque is a forgery."

" How dreadful ! how very dreadful ! is

that not really her signature? I know the other is Dr. Mansell's," she said hastily, and then coloured deeply.

"You are sure of that?" said Mr. Miller, pressing her hand. "Well, Mrs. Mansell does not deny this being her signature, but she says the amount has been altered, and it looks like it, for there is a discolouration in these two places," pointing out the slight stains in the figures and in the word eight.

"But what interest could Mr. Bolton have in doing such a thing, when he was dying, too, and was not obliged to send us any money?"

"My poor Grace," said Mr. Miller, "Mrs. Mansell cares no more for Mr. Bolton than she does for the man in the moon; she does not believe in the existence of a Mr. Bolton; his name is not on the

order. Just now she is in one of her tantrums, and has made up her mind that either you or Frank have been playing tricks with this paper."

"What can she do to us?" exclaimed Grace, with eyes dilated by terror; "we can give her back the money if it's hers—we have not spent it—only a very little, that is."

Before Mr. Miller could explain why this wholesome manner of dealing with the difficulty would not answer, the drawing-room door opened, and in stalked Miss de Witt.

Her genuine start of astonishment at seeing John Miller, the Twiston banker, sitting as if perfectly at home with little Nelly asleep on his knee and Grace's hand in his, made Grace jump up in confusion, and

brought a rich colour into the gentleman's face.

"Mr. Miller has been very kind," began Grace, as she went towards the old lady, who had not chosen to move a step or articulate a word.

"Will you permit me, Miss Lloyd, to explain to Miss de Witt the subject of our conversation?" said Mr. Miller, ready to laugh at the endeavour made by Grace at explanation.

When Miss de Witt heard what was the matter, she struck the carpet energetically with the point of her umbrella, her unfailing companion summer and winter.

"Who's right and who's wrong, I should like to know, for as sure as I stand here five feet ten and a half in my stocking soles,

it's some dirty trick of that handsome doctor."

"Oh, Miss de Witt!"

"Don't oh Miss de Witt me, but go down on your bare knees night and morning, girl, and thank God for your narrow escape—he never took *me* in—no one can say he did. You had better go and catechise him, Mr. Miller, you seem to have a liking for cross-examining," and the old grey eye twinkled merrily.

"I *am* going to Dr. Mansell's," answered the gentleman, quietly. "You will trust me with this letter, Miss Lloyd—it may serve to enlighten Mrs. Mansell as to who you received this cheque from." Then addressing himself specially to Miss de Witt—he had not had courage to tell it to Grace—he added, "The silly woman has got some ex-

traordinary notion into her head, that Miss Lloyd received it from Dr. Mansell. I want, if possible, to prevent her setting about foolish reports."

"Let me go with you," cried Grace crimsoning, and with indignation flashing from her eyes. "Dr. Mansell will never dare to say to my face he ever gave me a cheque, or that he has even spoken to me since his marriage."

"Well, well, child," said Miss de Witt, "I like your spirit, but don't put yourself into a flurry; go for your bonnet, and I'll stay here till you come back."

Miss de Witt now left the door, and sat herself down on the sofa in a magisterial way opposite to Mrs. Lloyd, making preparations for a long

stay by untying her thick Shetland veil—

“I say, Grace, what have you done with Miss Vick?—a nice chaperone she makes, as I shall tell her.”

Grace was happily already on the stair, and not obliged to hear the query.

“Am I not a capital nurse, Miss de Witt?” asked John Miller, as he laid the sleeping child on the sofa by her.

“Ah, John, John, I fear you are no wiser than the rest of your sex, and have been beguiled by a fair face.”

“Won’t you give your consent?”

“If you have got your own to commit a folly, rest satisfied with that.”

The savage old lady waited till she saw him and Grace outside the garden-gate, and

until she had secured another victim in Vick, then she added—

“I hope you’ll be happy, John, but I am sure you won’t. No fool like an old fool, eh, Miss Vick?”

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Sylvia left the Bank, she desired her coachman to drive to Ashburn. Her vexed and tormented spirit instinctively sought for some placid influence, and Sylvia longed for what she had never thought worth having before,—that is, the complacent hum-drum of the Miss Millers' society, and the quiet of their cheerful

morning room, with its quaint old-world look.

“The family were all out;” she had put many solaces out of her own reach, in the days when she believed that happiness there was none, save in the interchange of passionate love; and now Sylvia knew not where to seek the support of sympathy—not at Deepdene, certainly, yet thither she would go rather than to her own house.

She found her mother and Clementina with a room full of visitors. How strangely like was every person and thing in that gilded, over-furnished saloon, to what had been on that well-remembered day when she had flirted with the dragoons to make Dr. Mansell jealous.

What a curious pang of envy shot through Sylvia’s heart when she heard that Zephyrina

was out riding with Flora Maynard and Oscar Miller.

"Captain Miller is teaching Zephyrina to ride his Arabian," said Clementina.

"She'll break its back with her monstrous weight," was Sylvia's remark.

Clementina shrugged her puissant shoulders to say that it was no business of hers, and that she took no interest in the Arabian or its master.

Would she have cared more had she known there was a heart breaking at her side? Sylvia thought not—thought that if Clementina had guessed her feelings, she would have said—"It's your own fault."

How the poor aching heart wished that time could be rolled back, and she again an inmate of Deepdene—freedom and hope

still hers, with her dear-bought experience for their guide.

What is experience but the ghost of once living actions? Though one should arise from the dead, do such as Sylvia Birch ever profit by advice?

She wandered up stairs into what had been her own room in her girlhood; how comfortless it was—the bed without hangings—every article covered up.

Sylvia sat down there, however; it accorded better with her feelings than the gorgeous room below; solitude was best for her, since sympathy was out of the question.

The poor soul sat some time recalling the feelings with which she used to watch, in order to catch a glimpse of Dr. Mansell passing in his gig—recalling how she used

to hold her hand on her heart, to keep it, as it were, from fluttering out of her bosom.

She asks herself why she is made to expiate this love as a crime? — muses whether her lot is peculiar, or merely the common fate of all women who can love. Why was love given, then, if it were to be a source of misery?—or was love, in fact, the penalty every daughter of Eve had to pay for their first mother's transgression?

In deep dejection she took her way to the picture-gallery, to see the old Count—it was months since they had met.

Absorbed as she was in her own thoughts, Sylvia nevertheless remarked that he looked ill—more shrivelled than ever; the whole

vitality of his body seemed to be gathered into his eyes.

He followed her as an old pet dog might have done, as she walked up the gallery to the picture of Grisilda. She stood gazing at it some minutes, and one or two large tears, like summer rain-drops, fell out of her eyes on to the carpet. Sylvia was too passionate a woman to shed many tears ; when they did come, they were like heat drops.

"How stupid one is sometimes," she said ; "the idea of my sentimentalizing over a picture ! I think it's the sight of you alone in this great wilderness of a place. What do you do with yourself all day ?"

The Count hesitated before he timidly answered—

"I read this—" and he showed her an old German Bible, very much tattered, and held together by a heavy silver clasp—"and then I go to my sweet organ, and I send my prayers up to Heaven by it, and Heaven answers."

"Does it? I should like to hear it," said Sylvia.

"Ah, I never get answers but when I am alone, and then there are combinations unearthly, beautiful, that my fingers find by divine inspiration."

Sylvia was thoughtful over this reply, then she asked—

"Are the people here kinder to you?"

The old man's lips quivered a little as he said—

"Your gracious mother is thoughtful of me. Every day she says, 'Come, Count,

you and I must have a glass of wine together;' and the butler carves for me now, and that is very good of him—of everybody."

Sylvia turned sharply aside, and she tapped the floor with her foot, as she always did, when angry.

"What can I do for you, old friend?" she asked.

That was more than the Count could bear. He sat down, drew from his pocket such a thin, faded handkerchief, and slowly, quietly, laid a corner on his eyes, first on the one, then on the other.

"I must not come and see you, if I make you low-spirited," she said, in a dry, staccato voice, full of emotion; "we—such as you and I—must really be in want of real sorrows, to be as foolish as we both are."

And suddenly she gave a cry, and then broke into loud weeping.

It lasted but a few instants, then she wrung the Count's hand, and drawing her veil over her face, ran down to her carriage, and gave the order—home.

Home! ought not that to be a sweet, cheering sound to a young wife?

Home! it sounded to Sylvia like the death-warrant of her earthly hopes.

When she stepped into her own hall, the first sight she saw was Dr. Mansell's hat on the marble slab, his gloves neatly laid across the rim; this was one of his habits. The first sound she heard was the ringing laugh of a little child, her own child, his child.

Sylvia's eyes were once more full of tears, as she went into the drawing-room. How pleasant it was, how fragrant the smell of

the mignonette coming in at the opened windows. Books, pictures, musical instruments, everything denoting luxury and elegant tastes, were gathered together in those pretty rooms.

Sylvia threw off her bonnet and lay down on a sofa in the little back room, closing her eyes, and wishing for nothing so much as quiet. Peace—or if that could not be, quiet; that wish had entered her soul from the hour of her leaving the banker's room. Her restlessness, her craving for emotion, seemed sated; she longed after a dull, common-place routine of life, so that she might have quiet. She had had enough of soaring after happiness; she wanted, she wished for nothing more exalted than quiet.

“Beautifully small, and less by degrees,” had been the words Sylvia used in describing

what the intercourse between her and her husband had become.

Love and fury had distinguished the first epoch of their married life ; bitterness and jealousy the second. They had passed from an intermittent storm of quarrels, explanations, and reconciliations, and had arrived at a permanent, unvaried disagreement. Every evanescent return to gentle or kindly feelings Sylvia felt was over.

In that charming room in which Sylvia now lay, wishing only for quiet, it was Dr. Mansell's habit to speak out hard truths for Sylvia to hear, in a hard, matter-of-fact tone. It was Sylvia's habit to scourge him with harder truths, delivered in a contemptuous manner, nearly amounting to loathing. She was the more pitiless of the two, for she had loved him. She had often

held up there before him a picture of his mean nature, such that had he had an iota more of self-respect in him, he must long ago have separated from her.

It was more the remembrance of her sufferings from jealousy than jealousy itself, which had given Sylvia any thirst for revenge. She did not care now to have Dr. Mansell's affection, but she hated the girl who, she believed, had shut her out from her husband's heart, and rejoiced, as only love turned to hate can rejoice, at having found the vulnerable point in her husband's armour of egotism.

Sylvia even yet had not realized the truth of her mother's opinion, that Dr. Mansell was incapable of loving aught but his own interest; she was not yet cool enough to see that it was his weak moral nature which

made him so noxious to any one depending on him for affection. She in fact honoured him too much by attributing his shortcomings towards her to a strong attachment for another ; honoured him too much by imagining she could wound him through any other channel than himself.

She was still lying on the sofa in the back drawing-room, when, a rare occurrence now, Dr. Mansell came up by the private stair from his study, and entering by a door behind the sofa, asked her if she had the "Times."

Sylvia raised her head to look at him, and he was so struck by the wild paleness of her face, that he asked her if she were ill.

"No—never better."

There was something in her voice and

look so at variance with the words, that Dr. Mansell felt thunder in the air.

"Better have it over at once," he said to himself, and sat down near a window, spreading out the newspaper between him and Sylvia. At that instant, though there was no visible sign to guide him, he was as certain as though it had been specially revealed to him, that the cheque had come to hand.

When he had paid in money to Sylvia's credit more than sufficient to meet the order he had given to the dapper man, Dr. Mansell felt his conscience quite light and easy. Like Fag in the play, it was the being found out that hurt him. As for a scene between Sylvia and himself on the subject, it would be disagreeable, but would not last for ever; and though he would have preferred

not being so much in her power, yet he was sure of her never divulging that secret.

As month after month elapsed, however, and there was no news of the cheque, Dr. Mansell got entirely relieved of the fear that had tyrannised over his sleeping and waking thoughts, and eye and ear ceased to be so painfully on the alert. He came to doubt the act being so very heinous after all: he had a right to Sylvia's money, any way he chose; at all events no harm was done, and he had been severely enough punished by the fright he had got.

How was it, that Sylvia's look, and such unmeaning words as her answer to his question, made the recollection of the dapper man start at once out of the dusty corner of his soul in which he had covered it up?

How was it that he actually felt something like alarm?

After a short pause, and in spite of her promise to Mr. Miller, Sylvia said,

"I have been to Ashburn, to Deepdene, and to the Bank."

"A curious catalogue of visits," he answered. "I hope your finances are in a satisfactory state."

He wanted her to explain herself. As he would have expressed himself, had he spoken, "he wanted it over."

While Sylvia was wrestling with a wish to attack him, a servant opened the door, saying in a low voice,

"Miss Lloyd and Mr. Miller are in the next room."

"Show them in here," said Mrs. Mansell, in her most imperative voice.

Dr. Mansell had caught the name of Miller, not that of Lloyd—he rose.

“Stay where you are, Dr. Mansell,” continued Sylvia, “I want you particularly.”

The quondam rivals have met at last. The first look exchanged between them was one of sheer curiosity. Something resembling the ruffle on water, when the wind is coming up, passed over Sylvia’s face, as she recognised in Grace a strong likeness to the Deepdene Griselda ; neither the unfashionable dress, nor the poky straw bonnet could hide from Mrs. Mansell, that Grace was eminently beautiful.

One woman appraises the attractions of another, in a glance.

Sylvia saw, and succumbed inwardly to that beauty. which indeed derived its greatest

charm from the impress given to it by a superior moral nature.

Involuntarily Grace shrunk from Sylvia's pale long face, in which the workings of the muscles were scarcely shielded from view by the integuments of the skin.

Grace was too alarmed at the fierce gaze of the pale-coloured eye, to dare to scrutinize in her turn Sylvia's appearance.

Grace guessed she was in that very little back room, about which she had had such happy dreams ; and she shuddered to find herself there.

She had crossed the threshold of the door "at which a Peri might stand and cry her eyes out in vain for admittance ;" and not to find there a sanctuary of domestic bliss, but to stand on her self-defence.

Then, how strangely altered her position with regard to the man who had gladdened her girl's heart by those winning words.

The unbroken silence of the few seconds taken up in this examination of one another by the two young women, was like the lull before the first shot which begins a battle.

Had Mr. Miller been required to confess his private feelings, he would have had to own that his heart beat in an accelerated manner when he saw Grace put aside the chair he had offered her, and walk firmly to the table at which Mrs. Mansell had seated herself, and speaking in her soft slow way, say,

"I am obliged to intrude on you, Mrs. Mansell, to explain how a cheque, bearing your signature, came into my hands."

Dr. Mansell turned the hue of chalk.

It was but just that it should be the gentle hand of Grace which dealt the blow.

This re-appearance of the cheque he was innately convinced was not due to mere chance.

The dapper man had not perished by sea or land.

He lived, and as Bolton's friend had no doubt heard of the relation in which Dr. Mansell had once stood to the Lloyds, as little doubt, that the dapper man had seen through the manoeuvre of the crossed cheque, if he did not suspect its real nature.

The move had hit Dr. Mansell with mathematical precision, he was check-mated.

"I shall be glad to hear," was Sylvia's scarcely articulate reply to Grace's address.

Grace turned to Mr. Miller, who taking out his pocket-book, drew from it Mrs. Bolton's letter, and Grace, handing it to Mrs. Mansell, begged her to read it.

Sylvia merely glanced her eye over it, perhaps her sight was dim.

"All I say," returned Mrs. Mansell with a sort of irritable languor, "is, that only your name, Miss Grace Lloyd, and that of Dr. Mansell's are on the cheque. I have nothing to do with Mrs. Bolton, her name does not figure lovingly by the side of the other two,—that lady, you know, is quite an *être de raison* for me. As to the friend who so obligingly forwards the cheque from Heaven knows where, he is

probably what some one calls a man of straw."

All this was spoken with a miserable attempt at haughty impertinence.

"I see the difficulty now," said Grace, suddenly perceiving that it was not so easy to clear herself. "I don't know what to do to convince you, Mrs. Mansell, that it is impossible that either my young brother or myself could have committed such a dreadful act as altering the figures which Mr. Miller told me you said had been done, but—"

"My old cheque-books are there," interrupted Sylvia, pointing to her Davenport, "and the sums of every cheque I have given for the last two years are noted down—every one of them."

"But I was going to say," continued

Grace firmly, "I *can* prove that I never received any sort of money order from Dr. Mansell."

"Indeed! and in what way?"

"Dr. Mansell will tell you so himself."

Dr. Mansell, from the first sound of Grace's voice, had avoided the eyes of all present, apparently engrossed by the interesting operation of trimming his handsome nails with his handsome penknife. When he heard his own name pronounced by Grace, he raised his head, and his face seemed to Mr. Miller, the only one of the party calm enough for observation, to have become suddenly aged. Every line had deepened.

Without meeting Grace's eyes, he looked at Sylvia, who was shrugging her shoulders, and said hastily—

"If Mrs. Mansell is as much mistaken in

the one assertion as she is in the other, she has only acted according to custom, making much ado about nothing."

"Mistaken!" repeated Sylvia vehemently; "mistaken! I'll soon prove that."

Then, and only then, did the banker perceive the dirty cheque in Sylvia's hand; he had forgotten that he had placed it within Mrs. Bolton's letter.

Sylvia threw back the cylinder front of the Davenport, originally purchased for Grace, and pressing a spring, forced out a secret drawer, from which she took the remains of a cheque-book.

With the decision of one indubitably certain of the fact she had advanced, Sylvia brushed over the margins, or whatever they may be called, until she found the one she was in search of. As she read the memo-

random on it, from pale, extraordinarily pale, that she had been before, she became the colour of a waxen image, as if all the living blood in her veins had frozen or vanished.

“Mr. Miller, come here,” she cried out, and taking his hand, she made him stoop till his ear was on a level with her lips; then in a whisper, faint and husky, she said—

“Look here, no one but *he* could have got at it.”

Mr. Miller saw, and saw also with a sensation akin to relief, that the figures on the memo. corresponded with those on the disputed cheque.

“Is there no law to punish husbands who rob their wives for such . . .”

“Hush!” said Mr. Miller, laying his

hand forcibly over her lips ; “ don’t speak, or you will repent it as long as you live ; ay, one more insulting word, and you, and your children’s children, shall repent in shame and agony. You are looking at my wife, Mrs. Mansell.”

“ Sylvia, don’t be childish,” said Dr. Mansell, walking up and standing defiant before her ; “ you are angry, because you are found to be all in the wrong,” and he bent on her one of those magical looks by which men subdue wild beasts.

“ I would willingly ask your pardon on my knees, Miss Lloyd,” said Dr. Mansell, “ for the trouble, the unnecessary trouble, you have been put to ; I regret this *contre-temps* more than I can tell.”

And the polite Doctor, seeing that Grace

was making her way as fast as she could out of the room, politely rang the bell.

“Give me back the cheque, Mrs. Mansell,” said Mr. Miller, “you can communicate with me hereafter respecting its being genuine or not ; any prosecution for forgery rests with us. Give it back to me,” he added, in a softened voice, leaning over her ; “you, poor troubled woman ! can you not believe in your old friend, John Miller ? Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” he whispered solemnly.

The almost divine compassion which spoke alike in the eyes fixed on her, and in his agitated voice, found its way to Sylvia’s hardening heart. She saw tears in the eyes bent on her, and with a sudden impulse she said—

“God bless you, John Miller ! God bless

you and yours ! Here, take it, it's a filthy bargain, but it's best with you. If I kept it, he," pointing with her finger over her shoulder in the direction of Dr. Mansell, "might wipe me out as cleverly as he did that writing ; if I die suddenly, have an inquest on me. Tell that girl I am sure she had nothing to do with it, and take care of the nasty witness for her sake. John Miller, you have got the last bit of good that was in me. Now go."

CHAPTER XII.

THE husband and wife are alone ; she is in a chair directly in front of him—her elbows on her knees, her chin on the palms of her hands ; thus she sits, while conflicting feelings sweep wildly through her soul, convulsing every flexible feature.

“Come, I think we have had enough of the tragics for one day, Sylvia,” began Dr.

Mansell. "Husbands and wives are one flesh, my dear, and it's high time I should make you understand an old saying; one which lords and masters find it necessary occasionally to repeat to their better halves; listen and learn: what's mine is my own; what's yours is mine. I am not desirous, I assure you, of commencing another rum-pus; I am merely answering your very odd question to Mr. Miller, and which he rather cavalierly left unanswered."

The passion that raged within Sylvia's slender form while Dr. Mansell spoke so provokingly, threatened her with a fit of some kind. Her eyes shot fire, she beat her breast, darting from side to side of the room, like some wild animal in a cage.

Dr. Mansell thought it best to feign an

indifference he did not quite feel, so he added—

“I am used to all this sort of thing, Sylvia, it has no effect on me now; you had better sit down, and give up making a fool of yourself.”

She went close up to him—very close—and looked long and searchingly into his face.

“Well,” he said, “I hope you like it.”

This was mere vulgar bravado, but it was infinitely ill timed.

“And I really did love this creature,” she said.

He laughed.

“You may take your oath of that, my dear.”

The staff was broken over her then.

Oh, the woe, the unfathomable, the

immeasurable woe, of that woman's heart. She sat down speechless. God has granted no human sound that can reveal what she felt. He alone can send balm for such a wounded spirit ; and in mercy He restrains the lips that the soul may be forced to turn to Him in its great need.

"Thank God," said Dr. Mansell, "I have not had to touch your money."

"Be silent, and leave God's name alone; what has He to do with you or me?—Don't go away, I have something that I must and will say."

"Well, say it, and be done with it!" and he re-commenced arranging his nails.

"You need not be in such a hurry, Max, for it's the last time I shall ever speak to you—do you hear me?"

"Hear you ! of course I do."

"Literally for the last time: as I hope for mercy hereafter, after I leave this room, I will never speak to you again—may I drop down dead if I do!—so don't irritate me uselessly now."

She stopped, for she had lost the thread of her discourse.

"I have no doubt you'll do something excessively ridiculous; it was your way, and will be your way to the end, I suppose, setting up for a heroine—by G—d, all I can say is, that I think you use me very ill, and all your relations use me very ill. Why are you to have a pension to live on, instead of a respectable sum of money?"

"Ah, that's it," she said, stopping him.
"Money, always money, nothing but money. You stupid fool! you might have had all

my money, and welcome. I was only sorry there wasn't more to give. Oh, Max, Max, I was passionate, jealous, exacting—what you will, but I was always above board with you—why weren't you so with me?—why didn't you tell me from the first you couldn't care for me because you cared for some one else? It was a shabby trick, to take me only for money's sake, and then treat me as you have done."

"If that's what you have got to say, there's no earthly reason for my staying any longer. I know how it will end—lash—lash—till we neither of us know what we are about."

"I wonder how I ever came to love you, I do, indeed. Max, do you know I once used to watch for the sound of your step—yes, I did, and could always hear it coming,

whatever I was doing. Oh, it's no joke—I really did not care for anything in the world but you. I was so proud and happy when we went out together. I was always saying to myself—“he is mine—he is mine—” when I saw you looking so much better than the rest of the men about you—you can't think what a feeling it was.”

Dr. Mansell had given over filing his nails.

“I don't know how it came nor how it went,” continued Sylvia; “I suppose it's always so with love. The truth, that I did not care for you any longer, has been knocking at my heart for a good while.”

“Since dear Oscar's return?” sneered Dr. Mansell.

“But I wouldn't let it in,” she went on, without noticing his interruption, “it's not

your being downright good for nothing, as I know you are, which has cured me. Love would have covered every sin, but it's the way you have deceived me all along—trampled on my best feelings—trampled on my self-respect. I shall never forgive you," she said, calmly—"at least, not till one of us is on a death-bed. I don't love you—I don't hate you, only, I don't care what you do or what becomes of you."

"The end of many another *grande passion*," he observed, coolly.

Sylvia smiled a wan smile as she remembered how Clementina and Zephyrina had joked about her "*grande passion*."

Dr. Mansell was rather puzzled what to say next.

“There is only one thing left for us, Max,” she said, rising from her chair—“let us pray for death to come and sever the tie that binds us. I have said what I had to say, so you can go now.”

“I’ll be whipped if I can make head or tail of it,” he muttered as he left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THOUGH bitterly annoyed and slightly uneasy at what had passed between Sylvia and himself, Dr. Mansell, as he had informed her in the polished words with which he closed their interview, was very far from understanding her aim and bent, insomuch that he was more inclined to laugh at than resent her persistence in a

course of silence. As to having lost her love, he did not believe a word of it—thought it a mere bombastic expression of anger.

What, though he had taken a liberty not quite justifiable perhaps legally (that was the way he put the case to himself,) with her cheque, after all, he meant it only as a ruse to get rid of a most inconvenient intruder; his paying in the money afterwards, showed that he had had no evil intentions.

She would come round no doubt Dr. Mansell thought. Only give her time, and she will forget and forgive.

Time sped along, however, and Sylvia did not come round: and now there was a new surprise for Dr. Mansell. He who had considered Sylvia's affection a bore and a

worry, missed it, and missed it most when the conviction was pressed home to him, that he might just as well long for a bright particular star as long for Sylvia's heart—he was wiped completely out of it.

He began to fear that scandal would be busy with their names—feared that the state of his domestic affairs might get wind, and give rise to disagreeable stories—and be the means of injuring him in his profession.

Mrs. Birch accompanied by her son, the little M. P., appeared together one fine day in Sylvia's drawing-room, in the characters of advisers and mediators.

“But you must have a reason, Sylvia, for such conduct; if it be a good and sufficient one, why not justify your conduct, at least to your own family, by giving it.?”

"My reason is so good a one, mamma, that I should not be justified in telling even you."

"But Dr. Mansell won't put up with this way of going on for ever; he will be taking violent steps."

"Let him, if he dares," said Sylvia. "I am ready to appear in any court into which he may have the right to summon me. I have heard of husbands doing something of the sort; but I am not afraid. What I have said, I'll keep to. My dear mother, I don't care a jot what the world says; it can't make me happy, can it?—well then, it must let me be unhappy my own way."

"There was no help for him," so Mrs. Birch announced to Dr. Mansell, adding—"that he had nobody to blame but himself—"

he ought to have kept to his engagement to Miss Lloyd—a sweet young person, Mrs. Birch believed—no good ever came, (and she had warned Sylvia in time,) of disproportionate matches.”

The blood of the Birches punished him for his audacity.

Mrs. Birch further informed Dr. Mansell that he had nothing to look to for consolation but holy patience or a legal separation. In the first case, Sylvia would behave herself with decorum, as a matter of course, in a Birch and a Plumthorne; in the second, the Birches would insist on a searching investigation; it was only what was due to Mrs. Mansell's sisters.

“Sylvia, however, would concede so far as to spend some months at her brother's seat of Mountworthy, on condition that

the child went with her. On her return to her own home, Mrs. Birch would advise that Count Kratzkieski, a very old and valued friend, should make one of Dr. Mansell's family, ostensibly as the little boy's tutor, but in effect to serve as a safe medium of communication between the husband and wife."

A strict neutrality was arranged in these terms for Dr. Mansell and Mrs. Mansell.

The Mansells became very wealthy. Some distant relation of the Birch family left Sylvia and her sisters handsome legacies.

Thus the one great ambition of Dr. Mansell's life is attained while he is still a young man. He looks old though, for a man scarcely over thirty; his hair is thin;

there are many grey threads among the brown curls; his fine features are dragged downwards as by some cord of an uneasy, dissatisfied heart, and there is a complete net-work of lines round his dimmed eyes. He has taken to spectacles—they hide his wavering glance, and are a safeguard against inquisitive looks.

Sylvia's dazzling eyes follow him—continually rest on him—they are as watchful as in her most loving, most jealous days; she behaves as her mother promised for her, most decorously, in private as well as in public.

Dr. Mansell's home is never disturbed by strife; but somehow every one suffers from a weight on their spirits when Dr. and Mrs. Mansell give their splendid dinners. They never give evening parties, and

Mrs. Mansell says she has lost her splendid voice.

People lower their tones when a stranger asks about Dr. Mansell, and he knows they do—he knows that more than once his name has had a pen drawn through it when it figured on a proposed list of directors or managers. Dr. Mansell never inquires into this—he scowls at certain persons, and avoids them.

A report is current in Twiston that Dr. Mansell is about to drop the M.D. altogether, and, as proprietor of a fine estate in the next county, enter on the career of a county gentleman.

“He’ll be getting into Parliament next,” said one of his less prosperous professional brethren, in retailing the gossip of the day to his wife. “One would think he had

found the philosopher's stone. What a successful fellow he has been!"

The successful man sits a lonely, unloved man at his splendid board; he never feels the clasp of a friendly hand—never enjoys the solace of free and sympathizing intercourse.

The successful man's constant companion is a small, impish thought whispering the possibility of the dapper man re-appearing with Lucilla on his arm.

Dr. Mansell has had a letter from his sister, written, she said, by her husband's desire, to warn him (warn was the word used, and it was underlined,) that he had sent the cheque received from Dr. Mansell to Mrs. Bolton, in lieu of Richard Bolton's gold.

Lucilla adds that her husband begs her to thank Dr. Mansell for having taken the precaution of giving him a crossed cheque.

Dr. Mansell cogitates on the word warn—on the thanks conveyed, and on the letter being sent a mail after the cheque itself—and he is convinced that the dapper man understood the trick, and is his enemy for life.

The sword of Damocles is no fable for the successful man.

As he sits opposite his wife, he sees it reflected in her large glittering eyes.

Even his little son, the oasis of the father's golden desert, is made to point it out to him.

"I have learnt to write words, papa—

look here," said the child, one day, presenting a copy-book.

It was bristling on every page with the word "honesty."

Dr. Mansell returns to his solitary study, and speculates on what might have been his fate had he kept his promise to Grace—had he preferred to incorporate Peter Schirr's motto of—

"Gerecht und Beharrlich"

in his coat-of-arms, instead of the katkins of the Birch family.

Without being a prophet, it is safe to predicate of a man with such low ambitions, that what he is he would have been, whether his choice had been Grace or Sylvia.

He was one—

————— Who loves to slide, not stand,
And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's
land.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. MANSELL'S wild accusation had placed John Miller and Grace in the most graceful of all relationships that can exist between man and woman, that of defender and defended.

He walked along happy and elate, with a wish that every one they met, could know how happy he was, and from time to time,

that is, very often, pressing the arm resting on his, closer to his side, as if to make Miss Lloyd aware if no other person could be taken into his confidence, that his heart was beating with love and joy.

But Grace, while her heart was much in the same state as that of John Miller's, was too true a woman not to torment herself a little, with the view of tormenting this excellent and beloved friend of her's also a little.

"I am not going away yet," said Mr. Miller, as Susan appeared at the front door. "I see Miss de Witt watching for us, so we must go up and tell her that we are all safe; and then we must have a private talk to ourselves, we have an immensity to settle, and this is my half-holiday."

Grace was prevented making any reply,

by Miss de Witt's calling out from the top of the stairs,

"Come up, good people, I am in a hurry to know the news."

As they reached the drawing-room, the spinster added,

"I have sent Miss Vick to her own room, told her John Miller had to say something not proper for her vestal ears to listen to, so you may speak out."

Catching sight of Grace's face, Miss de Witt in some real alarm exclaimed,

"God bless me, what's come over the girl, she's as white as a sheet, I say Grace, are you to go to prison?"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied John Miller, "Grace," (he said the name as if he did so glory in it,) "Grace is tired with a long walk and a disagreeable visit,

it has turned out a mare's nest, my dear madam."

"You get along with your mares' nests, and your dear madams. I am too old a bird to be caught with your chaff, John Miller. You won't tell me, I see that by your obstinate face, so I have a right to give the reins to my imagination, and I'll go far and wide on that animal, if you don't make it worth my while to put him in the stable. Now then."

John Miller would not yield, and Miss de Witt no doubt originated the sough of scandal that blew against the Mansells for the rest of their lives.

"Before I say good-morning, a word to the wise. Grace, my dear, don't forget while it is the summer of love, to make provision for the winter of hate ; one follows the other

as night to day. I'll see to the settlements myself, it's all I'll do for you. You have nothing to expect from me,—you have disappointed my wishes for you,—upset the only match I ever plotted for,—in short, taken John instead of Oscar, so I cut you off with a shilling and my benediction."

And away went the active old lady, delighted with the idea of her own sharpness.

As Grace had fancied on that day, when she came from Ashburn to visit her mother, Mrs. Lloyd was taking more intelligent notice of what happened in her presence. This she made plain by her violent, "No, no,"—as Grace was leaving the room, with John Miller, to grant him the boon of a *tête-à-tête*.

"Mamma seems to understand something," said Grace to Mr. Miller.

"Then I will tell her at once what we have settled," said he, smiling.

"Mrs. Lloyd," he began, "I have asked your daughter to be my wife; I am John Miller you know, Frankie's friend."

She looked very earnestly and anxiously in his face.

"Yes, my wife, and she has given me her promise to marry me, if you will come with her to her new home."

"Home," echoed Mrs. Lloyd, and she gazed round the shabby small room, awakening, as if for the first time to the consciousness of the great change in her circumstances.

"Grace's fault," she said, with an angry gesture.

"You must forgive her for that," he said gently, "and she will make you amends, she will give you back a comfortable home,—a very comfortable home. We have a pretty garden on which the sun lies warm, and where the birds sing, and we shall wheel you about there, and you will get strong again."

The poor lady stroked his face fondly with her feeble hands, and nodded.

"May Grace go with me to talk about our new home?"

"Go,—go, good man."

Vick was recalled to the drawing-room, and Grace went to the dining-room.

Once there, John Miller drew her to his affectionate heart, saying,

"All my own now, Grace, dear Grace."

And she, with her arms round his neck,

wept tears, caused by all sorts of happy and extraordinary feelings.

Grace then remembered her rag of misery, so she flourishes it in this manner.

"Did you know when you came here this morning, *all* that Mrs. Mansell suspected?"

"To be sure I did, and that was what brought me here, sooner than I meant after your bad behaviour to me at Ashburn."

"To be so suspected," went on Grace, with rather a tragedy tone.

"Grace," said Mr. Miller, gravely, "if I had not trusted you as my own soul, do you think I should have asked you to be my wife? Dearest, without trust, there may be passion, but not love."

"I don't mean only about the forgery," whispered Grace, hiding her face against his shoulder.

"Silly child, taking windmills for giants. Will you not let me be happy, Grace?"

She looked up at him with a smile, he thought lovelier than any of the lovely smiles she had ever given him before.

Mr. Miller got through his explanations at Ashburn very creditably. Miss Miller said she had seen it all along. Mr. and Mrs. Maynard offered sincere congratulations, and Flora, half crying and half laughing, let out that she wondered how Grace had taken Uncle John instead of Uncle Oscar, and was very earnest in making Uncle John promise to be very, very kind to dear Gracie; to re-

member she was much younger than he was, and never to be cross to her all the days of his life.

Uncle John promised, and became very fond of his pretty niece.

Mr. Miller's greatest trial proceeded from Miss Minnie, who had a private interview with him in the library, where she went through the formal ceremony of taking leave of him.

"As she could be of no further use at Ashburn, rather the contrary, she was resolved to become a Sister of Mercy to brothers who did not take wives to nurse them. She should leave before the wedding, as she knew her own feelings best. She was sure the world was governed supernaturally, such extraordinary events occurred; and finally she hoped

that Maggie and Grace would take to each other."

Maggie, with her hand in her father's, walked for an hour in Grace's favourite haunt, near the babbling brown brook. There John Miller told the little girl how he had loved and lost her mother; he told her in words suited to her comprehension, how many mourning and solitary years he had passed, scarcely hoping to find any one to be kind and loving to Maggie and himself, until he met Miss Lloyd.

"Do you think that Hope on poor mamma's tomb, had anything to do with it, papa?" asked Maggie, very gravely.

"What Hope, my dear child?"

Maggie relates how she had seen Miss Lloyd's picture in marble on the monument

to her mother's memory; and then John Miller recollects his impression when he first met Grace, that he had seen her somewhere before; it must have been her bust that he had seen in Mr. Veitch's studio.

Mr. Miller thinks of his sister Minnie's observations about the extraordinary occurrences of life.

Maggie roused him from his meditation by—

"So you are Miss Lloyd's sweetheart, papa, like Mr. Vernon is Flora's?"

"You are fond of Miss Lloyd, Maggie?" asked the father, avoiding a direct answer.

"Yes, she's a trump, and no mistake," was the decided reply.

Mr. Miller could not help laughing, but

he wisely refrained from animadverting on the form in which Maggie's approval was couched.

CONCLUSION.

GRACE's marriage took place on the twenty-second of September, on a lovely autumn morning. Mr. Miller accomplished on that auspicious day his thirty-ninth year.

In spite of that, his bride was convinced that he was perfection, and that he resembled the effigy of the knight on

the grand old monument in Mr. Read's church.

The wedding was a very pretty one, the bridesmaids were Flora, Maggie, and Nelly, and Mr. Read performed the service in the presence of all Grace's constant friends. Only one dear face was absent from the group. The bride had made that sacrifice. She did not wish Mr. Hitzig to feel himself deserted, and Frankie is to spend Christmas at Ashburn.

The wedding breakfast was at Miss de Witt's house, and that lady was overheard to say, "My dear, you have had the luck to marry a *rara avis*—a man with a warm heart and a good and strong mind;" but here the old lady stopped, and looked merrily about her, "but old as I am, I would not marry an old man."

It is said to have been the last speech with a sting in it uttered by the venerable spinster ; such can hardly have been the case, however, considering that she lived to see her handsome godson, Captain Oscar Miller, bullet and all, espoused by Miss Zephyrina Birch. It is impossible that she should have resisted the temptation of congratulating him on having secured to himself a Birch for life.

Mrs. Lloyd was installed at Ashburn ; and as Miss Minnie kept her word of becoming a Sister of Mercy, Miss Miller took Miss Vick to live with her, and thus gentle Vick's happiness was insured by its being sheltered under the wing of a kindly tyrant.

Miss Vick, removed to a distance from Mr. Moneypenny's dangerous society, soon

forgot she had ever been inconstant to the miniature lying in her trunk.

Flora is expiating the sin of having married for love, in the Mauritius where Mr., now Captain Vernon, is one of the governor's lately appointed aides-de-camp. Mrs. Vernon keeps up a lively correspondence with Mrs. Miller, and is so obstinate, that she won't confess she is unhappy.

The last glimpse of Ashburn to be had was through a remarkable telescope in the autumn of last year. A tall man is lying on a velvet lawn, shaded and sheltered by a quaint yew hedge, and a little child—a very little child—in a white frock and broad blue sash, is sturdily trying, like another Cock Robin, to bury the tall man under some fresh fallen leaves, that have been care-

fully swept off the velvet grass into small heaps.

How quiet the long man lies; ah—he is quiet no longer; he is sending the leaves in all directions, and the tiny busy one fills the air with screams of baby mirth.

Is it Nelly?—No, no; there is Nelly grown into a demure maiden of six years old, by the side of a sweet young lady, who is crossing the lawn to where the play-mates are.

What a pity! they have got mixed in with a number of persons; that fat, round fellow, is making very merry with a square-faced, lively, elderly woman, with a magnificent bow of pink ribbon at her collar, and very neat kid shoes on her feet. They are all gone—gone.

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That lovely young matron is Grace—
happy Grace—and the little Cock Robin is
her first born.

“It is possible to paint shade, not light.”

THE END.

